



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-3605

October 15, 2021

The Honorable Jennifer Granholm  
Secretary of Energy  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Ave., Southwest  
Washington, D.C. 20585

Dear Secretary Granholm:

On September 9, 2021, President Biden issued two orders requiring all-executive branch employees<sup>1</sup> and federal contractors<sup>2</sup> to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. While we understand the intent of these orders is to protect the health and safety of federal employees and contractors, we are concerned with the unintended impacts these orders may have on the Department of Energy (DOE) Defense Nuclear Sites and National Lab workforce and readiness. Our utmost concern is for mission security in protecting these national assets critical to our national defense and nuclear deterrence, particularly at Defense Nuclear Sites.

As you are well aware, the DOE has seventeen National Labs and ten active Defense Nuclear Sites across the country. These sites and labs conduct important research, development, and environmental stewardship missions critical to our national security and energy innovation. We have seen first-hand the state-of-the-art work at the Savannah River Site (SRS) and the Savannah River National Lab (SRNL), particularly with respect to nuclear non-proliferation efforts. We are grateful that South Carolina is home such a critical national security and technological development asset.

The SRNL has a staff of more than 900 employees and SRS employs a total of nearly 11,000 people, many of whom reside in our districts. We have heard first-hand from several employees regarding their concern with the COVID-19 vaccine mandate by the Biden Administration. These are employees who have dedicated their professional livelihoods to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/09/09/executive-order-on-requiring-coronavirus-disease-2019-vaccination-for-federal-employees/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/09/09/executive-order-on-ensuring-adequate-covid-safety-protocols-for-federal-contractors/>

tackling the nation's most complex nuclear security and environmental issues and are now faced with complying with a federal mandate, being fired, or quitting. When these dedicated employees leave, along with them go their decades of knowledge that is critical to maintaining our nuclear security.

SRS and SRNL are not alone in this predicament. DOE sites across the country are facing employees leaving because of the federal mandate. This is coupled with an already depleting workforce at these Labs as result of generational turnover.

With this in mind, we have the following questions:

- 1) Has the DOE considered the practical implications of inevitable workforce loss due to the federal COVID-19 vaccine mandates?
- 2) How will the practical reality of these federal mandates impede on our nation's nuclear security and readiness and what is the DOE doing to adjust?
- 3) How does the DOE intend to protect mission security, for example the plutonium management and disposition at SRS, should there be a critical work force reduction due to the federal COVID-19 vaccine mandates?
- 4) A significant number of the people we have heard from are part of the armed security on site. Is there a plan in place should there be a shortage of qualified security officers?
- 5) Is any special consideration being made for employees currently exclusively working from home?
- 6) Is any specific consideration being made for those employees nearing retirement age and at risk of losing a significant amount of retirement benefits?

We urge you to consider these concerns and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



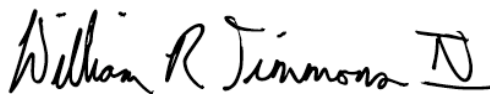
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Jeff Duncan  
Member of Congress



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Joe Wilson  
Member of Congress



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William R. Timmons, IV  
Member of Congress



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Rick W. Allen  
Member of Congress