

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 23, 2026

The Honorable Chris Wright
Secretary, Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Secretary Wright:

We write expressing serious concern regarding the Department of Energy's (DOE) continued practice of permitting foreign nationals from China to access facilities across the National Laboratory complex and work alongside American scientists. Recent DOE data underscores that this practice puts the nation's research enterprise at risk of foreign intelligence collection and technology transfers that will benefit our adversaries.

According to DOE's own data, Chinese nationals continue to occupy substantial roles across a variety of access types, including short-term visits (approximately 1,900 in FY 2025), long-term research assignments (approximately 1,300 in FY 2025), and even formal employment (approximately 2,100 in FY 2025). The Department further reports in FY 2025, on-site user facilities at the National Labs were accessed physically and remotely more than 5,000 times by Chinese nationals. These facts reflect severe vulnerabilities at our nation's premier and most sensitive scientific environments.

China is our main competitor in research and development and the race for emerging tech, where it seeks to surpass the United States by stealing American intellectual property and technologies. This is widely known and well-documented, and yet for decades we continue to give Chinese national scientists access to our National Laboratories.

These numbers are not small, nor are they incidental. They represent a systemic exposure of our National Labs, including the American scientists who work there and topics they are working on, to an adversary determined to defeat the United States. Given that DOE has not substantially reduced this exposure, we respectfully request answers to the following:

1. How does DOE's risk framework account for China's National Intelligence Law, which legally obligates every Chinese citizen—including those working in our National Laboratories—to cooperate with Chinese intelligence services upon demand, regardless of where they reside?
2. Why does the Department permit Chinese nationals to work inside the National Labs, side by side with American scientists?
3. Are Chinese nationals given access to controlled technologies, export-controlled technologies, or any other sensitive research environments within the National Laboratories? If so, how many?

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4. What steps is DOE taking to reduce remote access by Chinese nationals, given the Department's own finding that thousands of users operate remotely with limited oversight?
5. Does DOE intend to reduce or cap Chinese nationals' participation in unclassified research areas, and if not, why not?
6. What counterintelligence assessments has DOE conducted regarding the concentration of Chinese nationals in specific labs, programs, or user facilities?

The Department's mission is to advance American scientific leadership, protect national security, and safeguard critical technologies. This mission can't be achieved when it's undermined by thousands of Chinese nationals infiltrating the National Labs each year. We look forward to your thoughts on these systemic vulnerabilities affecting our labs.

Sincerely,



Tom Cotton
United States Senator



Mike Lee
United States Senator

CC:

The Honorable Marco Rubio, National Security Advisor and Secretary of State
The Honorable Todd Blanche, Acting Attorney General Department of Justice
The Honorable John Ratcliffe, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency
The Honorable Kashyap Patel, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation