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Congress of the United States House of Representatives

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

March 30, 2021

The Honorable Jennifer M. Granholm
Secretary of Energy
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20585

Dear Secretary Granholm,

Congratulations on your confirmation as the 16th Secretary of the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). DOE has a significant footprint in Washington's 4th District, including numerous opportunities for research, development, and deployment of new innovative energy technologies. I look forward to working with you on our many important shared priorities in Central Washington.

I write specifically to extend a personal invitation for you to tour the Hanford Site, which represents one of the most significant and challenging components of DOE's work – not just in our region, but nationwide. Hanford cleanup represents one of the most significant liabilities across the federal government, and it is vital that all partners in this important cleanup mission, including the federal government, congressional delegation, the State of Washington, and local communities, work together in a concerted and responsible manner for the health and safety of communities in the Tri-Cities, Washington state, and the entire Pacific Northwest. Unfortunately, recent actions taken by Washington state leaders have jeopardized this working relationship and irresponsibly inserted partisan politics into what should be a non-partisan priority. It is my hope that these actions will not harm the cleanup mission, and that by working together, we can mutually ensure the safe, effective, and efficient cleanup of the Site.

The Hanford Site is the largest defense nuclear cleanup site in the country and is one of 17 such sites being remediated under DOE's Environmental Management (EM) program. DOE's Office of River Protection (ORP) is responsible for treating the approximately 56 million gallons of this waste stored in 177 underground storage tanks at Hanford. Work conducted by ORP to safely treat this waste is the largest and most complex environmental remediation project in the nation. The federal government is subject to legally-enforceable milestones on tank waste retrieval and treatment through the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA), along with a consent decree between DOE, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the State of Washington.

DOE's Richland Operations Office is responsible for all non-tank waste cleanup activities throughout the Hanford Site. This work, including soil and groundwater remediation, facility decontamination and decommissioning, and stabilization and disposition of nuclear materials,

spent nuclear fuel, and non-tank waste, is critical to ensuring the prevention of dangerous contaminants from reaching the Columbia River.

The Washington delegation has a long history of non-partisan support for Hanford cleanup. It is tradition for the 4th District Representative and the delegation to encourage new administrations and Energy Secretaries to learn more about the unique challenges facing the Site and the importance of strong funding for the cleanup mission – and to specifically do so by extending invitations for these leaders to come see the cleanup efforts firsthand through an on-the-ground tour. I have done so with past Administrations of both parties, and I will continue to do so moving forward.

It is with this context that I must express my serious disappointment with the letter Attorney General Bob Ferguson, Washington State Director of Ecology Laura Watson, the Yakama Nation, and several special interest groups sent you just one day after your confirmation vote asking you to rescind DOE's current high-level radioactive waste (HLW) interpretation. Not only was it unprecedented and seriously lacking in judgment for these officials to sign onto a letter alongside special interest groups, the letter also purports to attack the scientific grounds of the proposal in a misleading and false manner.

As the leaders of Hanford Communities have subsequently written you, the position taken in this letter does not speak for nor represent the best interests of the Tri-Cities. These communities – who have the most at stake and are the most directly impacted by decisions at the Site – must be heard by both the state and federal government. They and others believe the HLW interpretation has the potential to make their community safer by treating tank waste sooner. The interpretation could also significantly reduce tank waste treatment costs, which would allow those savings to be reinvested in other important cleanup activities at Hanford.

Even though these local leaders have made numerous attempts to share their perspective with the Governor's office, the Attorney General's office, and the Department of Ecology on this issue, state leaders still went forward with sending you a kneejerk letter without consulting the local community– thereby tarnishing and jeopardizing what should be the start of an important and productive working relationship with new DOE leadership.

Despite this unnecessary setback, I believe we can and should rise to the occasion in order to move forward with the Hanford cleanup. Previous administrations – along with the Washington delegation – have recognized the legal and moral obligation of the federal government to clean up Hanford, and I urge this Administration to do the same. I look forward to further discussing the ongoing cleanup work and its importance to the Tri-Cities and greater Pacific Northwest communities. I know that we can ensure the federal government fulfills its obligation by working together to achieve continued progress and safe remediation at the Hanford Site. Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and I look forward to welcoming you to Central Washington soon.

Sincerely,



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress