

Trump Administration Confirmation Hearings: Secretary of Energy Chris Wright Policy Insights

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After the first week of confirmation hearings, the first round of Executive Orders, and statements from President Trump, certain policy positions have begun to emerge. In this series, we summarize each candidate's relevant positions as it relates to international trade.

What we have learned is that a consistent theme for the new Administration is addressing the threat posed by China, energy independence, development of a U.S. energy capabilities, and strengthening the U.S. border against threats posed by illegal immigration and illicit drug smuggling.

For more insights on the Trump Administration, visit [Winston & Strawn's The First 100 Days](#).

Secretary of Energy Chris Wright

Chris Wright is the nominee for Secretary of Energy and is a scientist who studied Fusion Energy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as well as Solar Energy and Power Electronics at UC Berkeley. Wright committed to implementing Trump's "bold agenda" as an "unabashed steward for all sources of affordable, reliable, and secure American energy." He outlined three immediate priorities for the Department of Energy (DOE): (1) unleashing American energy at home and abroad to restore energy dominance; (2) leading the world in innovation and technology breakthroughs; and (3) building things in America again and removing barriers to progress (i.e., federal policies and "red tape"). See below for details on his positions in areas like nuclear energy, national security, and more.

ELECTRICAL GRID AND TRANSMISSION LINES

According to Wright, the most pressing problem in the energy world is the stability of the electricity grid. Wright is deeply concerned about our current trajectory and stated that we need to get serious about building infrastructure and bringing costs down. He indicated his desire to work with states to increase the grid's resilience.

When asked about transmission line permitting reform, Wright agreed that being able to build new transmission lines and repower existing transmission lines and grow their capacity are very important for reestablishing a decline in the real cost of electricity and a growth in reliability. Wright affirmed that the DOE would continue to use its

authorities and resources to support the kind of transmission projects that increase reliability and save customers money.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Wright called the DOE “essential” to national security. He acknowledged that the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), as a part of the DOE, is the critical designer and maintainer (through contractors) of America’s nuclear arsenal. He called the NNSA the ultimate guarantor of our sovereignty and identified the nuclear arsenal and the coming instabilities with the electrical grid as his biggest concerns.

Wright acknowledged that cybersecurity is crucial but stated that it is too early to opine on a particular program. But he committed to supporting, to the extent possible, all efforts in national security. He also recognized the grave importance of ensuring that the DOE’s sensitive facilities are not compromised by adversaries.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE – CHINA AND RUSSIA

Wright indicated that nothing is more important than Americans’ access to affordable energy. He affirmed that when considering natural gas exports, he would consider the cost of energy for Americans. He lamented how dependent America has become on imported enriched uranium from Russia—an area that he said requires urgent action. Similarly, Wright stated that the U.S. should not be dependent upon China for critical supplies required to turn on lights and power our factories.

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Wright stated that, despite the existence of compelling technology, we need better technologies to get Americans comfortable with the safety and security of nuclear energy. He said that the biggest and most important use of energy is high temperature process heat, which is used to create steel, metals, cement, etc.; nuclear energy could provide this high temperature process heat to facilitate manufacturing. He predicts broad investments in the research and enabling technologies.

In terms of leadership, Wright is firmly in favor of an alliance or partnership in which the United States leads the world in converting over to nuclear energy; Wright would like to see nuclear energy grow faster than it has been. He signaled that he would prioritize building and securing America’s nuclear fuel supply chain. He also said that with sensible regulation and safeguards, nuclear waste is among the most manageable because the volume of waste is relatively small.

CLIMATE CHANGE, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION

Wright promotes evolving our energy system and believes there are opportunities to accelerate development of new energy technologies that are “really the only pathway” to address climate change. He stated, “We should have nothing but American leadership in this area—energy and climate is a global problem, but America should be the leader.”

In Wright’s view, there is not “dirty” or “clean” energy—all energies are different and have different tradeoffs. Wright stated that he does not harbor the aversions to fossil fuels that others do; he is all about new technology to improve energy sources across the board and supports all energy technologies that can improve human lives and reduce emissions. He acknowledged the significant risk posed by continued use of fossil fuels but stated that advancement of energy technologies that grow the amount of energy and drive down costs and emissions are wins in all scenarios. A recurring theme was reducing emissions through innovation and not regulation.

Disclaimer: This information is strictly to provide public information on the administrations’ policy positions and in no way indicates an affiliation with any political party.

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