

# United States Senate

June 2, 2025

Honorable Chris Wright  
Secretary of Energy  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Wright,

As you know, the research conducted at the Department of Energy's (DOE) National Laboratories is enhancing our nation's economic competitiveness, strengthening our national security, developing new technologies, and advancing fundamental and applied science. Iowans are especially proud of the amazing work conducted at the Ames National Laboratory that has been inspiring minds for more than 70 years.

As a result of this success, National Laboratories are prime targets for espionage and theft by foreign adversaries. The Government Accountability Office warns "threats can come from external adversaries or from 'insiders,' including employees or visitors with trusted access."<sup>1</sup> For decades, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been actively recruiting scientists from National Labs to work on their own military programs and stealing our research using visiting students and scholars.<sup>2</sup>

For these reasons, it is very concerning thousands of citizens from China and Russia were granted access to National Labs last year alone.<sup>3</sup>

It is vitally important every possible measure is being taken to protect the work of our scientists and researchers from theft and espionage, especially within our own labs.

Please provide the total number of visitors to National Labs in Fiscal Year 2022, 2023 and 2024 from (1) Russia; (2) the People's Republic of China; and (3) Iran.

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<sup>1</sup> "NUCLEAR SECURITY DOE Should Take Actions to Fully Implement Insider Threat Program," Government Accountability Office, May 2023; <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-105576.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> "The Los Alamos Club: New Report Details China's Efforts to Recruit Leading U.S. Department of Energy Scientists to Advance Defense Technology Programs for the People's Republic of China," Strider, September 22, 2022; <https://content.striderintel.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Strider-Los-Alamos-Report.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Title IV, Subtitle D, Section 435 of S. 4443, Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/4443/text>.

For each of the fiscal years, also provide the number of visitors from these nations who were (1) assessed for counterintelligence risks to research or activities at the National Labs prior to being granted access; and (2) permitted to utilize laboratory equipment or facilities for research or production.

I sent a similar request to then-Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm on September 18, 2024, but never received a response.

Thank you for your attention to this request. I would appreciate a response no later than September 1, 2025.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joni K. Ernst". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Joni K. Ernst  
United States Senator