

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 7, 2023

Dr. William A. LaPlante
Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment
3010 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-3010

Dear Undersecretary LaPlante:

As strong supporters of our military's nuclear capabilities, we write today to express our support for Project Pele. Given the projected increase in battlefield energy usage, it is imperative that the Department of Defense (DOD) continues its support for Project Pele while also taking the necessary steps to ensure this new technology can be seamlessly integrated as soon as feasible.

Project Pele was launched by the DOD in response to findings by the Defense Science Board (DSB) that projected a significant increase in battlefield energy usage. The DSB also indicated that the intermittent character of alternative energy sources could likely not keep pace with the DOD's energy needs. This is of particular concern for remote sites in Alaska, the Arctic, and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) area of responsibility, all of which are currently dependent on traditional fuel sources to meet their energy needs. In addition, this capability will be crucial for other federal facilities and critical infrastructure including the intelligence community, the Department of Energy, national laboratories, data centers, hospitals, and other facilities that require uninterrupted power sources.

Many military sites in these regions are at a disadvantage due to their small size and inaccessibility to broader electrical grids. These factors make it difficult to receive energy from traditional fuel sources and nearly impossible to generate sufficient energy from renewable ones. Additionally, existing supply lines providing traditional fuel sources to these locations are challenged by our adversaries' firepower. The 2022 National Defense Strategy emphasized the importance of energy resilience in the wars of the future, with an increased national focus on "more efficient and clean-energy technologies that reduce logistics requirements in contested or austere environments."

Nuclear is the only energy source that can provide carbon-free, baseload energy for critical infrastructure in these locations. Project Pele seeks to design, build and demonstrate a prototype mobile nuclear reactor at the Idaho National Laboratory (INL) by 2025. It has received strong, bipartisan support in Congress and has been funded in the President's Budget for the past four years.

We are concerned that a delayed transition decision on nuclear microreactors will diminish the new supply chain stood up to execute Project Pele, which is a serious problem for an industry that has produced few new reactors in the United States over the past few decades. As such, we ask that you please provide an update on the project, including the most recent timeline available, to ensure Project Pele is on schedule for deployment to INL by 2025. We also ask that

you share the Department's plans to transition Pele to a Program of Record. Additionally, please detail the DOD's plans for implementing this technology once it proves feasibility.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and answers to these questions. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any follow-up questions.

Sincerely,



Mike Crapo
United States Senator



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



James E. Risch
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Ted Budd
United States Senator



JD Vance
United States Senator