

Opening Statement of Chairman Rob Bishop (R-UT)
Committee on Natural Resources

Oversight hearing titled *“Policy Priorities at the Department of the Interior and the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Proposal”*

Welcome back to the Committee, Mr. Secretary.

We are pleased to have you here to testify on the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2019 budget and its policy priorities for the Department of the Interior.

Let me start by offering my praise for your work on many fronts to improve land and resource management functions of the Department. Over the past year, you've worked proactively to reposition the Department as an ally and advocate to the people it serves, and to restore its core statutory functions.

The administration has also prioritized greater American energy abundance and security, and you have positioned the Department as a chief contributor in this endeavor.

In doing so, you’ve acted to address many overly burdensome regulations initiated under the prior administration that resulted in hindered American energy development on federal lands, lost revenues and fewer opportunities for western communities.

Additionally, the Department has used its existing authorities to promote the responsible development of our vast onshore and offshore energy resources, including the Department's proposed National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

Whether they know it are not, many of my Democratic colleagues have become ardent supporters of federalism because of this plan. Imagine that: Political leaders wanting to decide if and how energy resources are developed in their states and not be dictated to from Washington. Unfortunately, their rush to defend local voices is only a priority when it benefits their own interests.

The administration and the Department have also demonstrated a commitment to greater stewardship of public lands. You clearly realize the importance of conserving and maintaining lands and resources already under federal control and have prioritized addressing our massive maintenance backlog as part of this effort.

You have also taken on a broader reorganization of the Department to improve agency bureaucracy, elevate local input and more effectively and efficiently serve communities and taxpayers.

The administration's FY2019 budget reflects a commitment to these priorities and several others.

The administration's nearly \$800 million-dollar budget investment in energy related programs demonstrates your commitment to an "All of the Above" energy strategy to promote both onshore and offshore development.

The budget request includes innovative solutions to tackle the maintenance backlog, including a Public Lands Infrastructure fund, which has garnered bipartisan support.

Some have criticized your proposal for its reliance on oil and gas revenues as its funding mechanism. Ironically, many of these same special interest groups have led the charge for **permanent** reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a program that is almost entirely funded by oil and gas development on federal lands.

Political posturing from a small group of fringe special interests shouldn't be allowed to detract a proposal viewed by most members as a thoughtful and creative legislative proposal. I appreciate your commitment to this issue and look forward to advancing a solution during this Congress.

As mentioned, the Department has also outlined an ambitious plan for reorganization, a concept I wholeheartedly

support. The Committee looks forward to continuing to work with you on this important initiative, and views the related \$17.5 million request within your budget as a down payment in this endeavor.

Mr. Secretary, you and your staff conducted significant outreach to Congress, Governors, local communities and interested stakeholders on this proposal. This sort of local engagement is important in all decisions your department makes and we hope this outreach will continue as you formalize next steps in the process.

The President's budget also makes tough choices, balancing fiscal realities while prioritizing scarce resources. Overall it reflects a commitment to restore public access to public lands, improve resource management and solutions that promote both conservation and economic prosperity.

This committee is dedicated to advancing shared goals and working to provide any additional tools and authorities necessary to achieve them. I look forward to your testimony and the engagement of our members.