



# Chairman Ken Calvert

*Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
House Committee on Appropriations*

## **Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Oversight Hearing: Department of the Interior**

**March 2, 2016**

### **Opening Statement as Prepared**

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Secretary Jewell, I'd like to welcome you to today's hearing, along with Deputy Secretary, Mike Connor, and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management, and Budget, Kris Sarri. Our hearing today will address the fiscal year 2017 budget priorities for the Department of the Interior.

Madam Secretary, let me begin by wishing you a belated happy birthday. With the November elections just around the corner, this may be your last budget hearing before our subcommittee as Secretary. On behalf of the subcommittee, I want to thank you for your service and willingness to have frank discussions regarding the challenges we face.

In particular, I want to thank you for your tireless, personal efforts to reform the Bureau of Indian Education. Working together, we have made real progress improving the quality of life and education throughout Indian country. This is further evidence that we can work together to find common ground even if we don't agree on every issue. In that spirit, I'd like to mention a few things before we receive your testimony.

Overall, the President's fiscal year 2017 budget request provides \$11.9 billion in discretionary funding for Department of the Interior programs under this subcommittee's jurisdiction, one percent below the fiscal year 2016 level. The budget request assumes a reduction of \$169 million in discretionary funding for wildland fire programs while providing \$290 million for fire programs through a budget cap adjustment.

The challenge of providing adequate wildfire funding remains one of the greatest challenges facing our subcommittee. The cost of fighting wildfires—particularly the one percent of the most catastrophic fires that consume 30 percent of the fire budget—continues to grow. Naturally, this puts pressure on every other account in our bill. I want to applaud my good friend and former subcommittee chairman, Mike Simpson, for his continuing efforts to address this issue through his bipartisan legislation which now has 145 cosponsors.

The budget request proposes funding PILT, which is so critical to our rural communities in the West, on the mandatory side of the ledger but without providing an offset. This budget gimmick only adds to our challenge of addressing many legitimate needs in this bill. So long as the Federal government continues acquiring more land—without guaranteeing that counties will be

fairly compensated for their lost tax revenue—questions will continue to be raised about Federal land acquisition in the West.

The centennial of the National Park Service is one of the highlights of this year's budget request. Last year, the subcommittee made a substantial investment in our national parks by providing additional funds for park operations and addressing longstanding deferred maintenance issues. We will endeavor to make similar investments this year within the confines of our 302(b) allocation.

Like many from the West, I'm concerned about the President using authority under the Antiquities Act for designating large national monuments. President Obama has used this authority 22 times since 2009 to designate nearly 4 million acres as new national monuments. This is more than every other president except Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. The concern I share with many Members is that these large designations often disregard the views and concerns of affected communities, local stakeholders, and their representatives in Congress.

Another challenge facing the Department and the subcommittee is the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The ESA is a well-intentioned statute that has saved numerous species from extinction. But its authorization has long expired; any talk of going through the reauthorization process shouldn't cause widespread panic. We can and must have an open, realistic discussion in Congress about what is working and what is not.

Voluntary conservation agreements, for example, are working and are quite popular. Let's do more of them. On the other hand, existing law has made it too easy for litigants to abuse their right to sue the Fish and Wildlife Service—and get reimbursed for it. It has tied the budget in knots and resulted in missed deadlines for other ESA mandates such as five-year reviews and down-listings. Making matters worse, the Agency is attempting to deal with the problem by settling lawsuits outside of the public eye. Less transparency is not the answer.

It has become increasingly clear that one of the Administration's primary goals is to make several forms of energy uneconomical—or even obsolete. The latest example is the White House using the Department to double down on its anti-coal agenda by proposing a three-year review of the Federal coal leasing program and a moratorium on new coal leasing on public lands. Many perceive this as yet another attack on a key industry that supports energy production and energy jobs in the United States.

I suspect that the Department will face a number of lawsuits on the decision to halt coal leasing on Federal lands. I also expect you'll encounter significant challenges from the States should you attempt to increase the cost of coal via higher bonding requirements.

Moving forward, the Committee fully expects the Department to follow the very clear congressional direction from the fiscal year 2016 Omnibus, working with States—as partners—on the Stream Buffer Rule rather than ignoring States as has been the case since 2010. This is an issue of great interest and concern to the Members of this Committee.

I'm also concerned that the Administration is taking a page from its "War on Coal" playbook and applying it to oil production. It appears that the Department is attempting to make it as costly as possible to operate offshore so investors will simply walk away from prospective sites. Onerous requirements under the Well Control Rule, for example, will likely lead job-producers to opt not to drill in areas currently producing oil. The result is an Obama Administration *de facto* moratorium on oil production without any engagement with Congress.

Lastly, even with the recent El Niño rains, my home state of California remains in the midst of a devastating drought affecting families, businesses, and landscapes across the West. While this subcommittee is limited in what it can do to address the drought itself, I implore you and the Department to apply common sense and take full advantage of opportunities under the law to store and pump these El Niño rains.

So far, even with increased rainfall, we have not pumped as much this year as we did last year. As of mid-February, more than 192,000 acre feet—enough water to serve over two million people for one year—has been lost because of a lack of adequate pumping. That is enough water to serve the cities of San Diego and San Francisco combined. Madam Secretary, you are in position to lessen the effects of drought on citizens of California. I ask you to use your remaining time as Secretary to provide some desperately needed relief to the people of my State.

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