

**Opening Statement  
Chair Raúl Grijalva  
Natural Resources Committee Oversight Hearing  
The Department of the Interior's Failure to Cooperate with  
Congressional Oversight Requests Thursday, September 26, 2019**

- **Congressional oversight of the executive branch is an integral part of our democracy's system of checks and balances. As representatives of the American people, Congress must help ensure that the current administration is acting in the best interests of the people, in concurrence with existing laws, and in a way that is free from corruption, fraud, and waste.**
  
- **But that has not stopped the Trump administration from delaying, obstructing, and sometimes just ignoring our efforts to conduct oversight.**

- **The Trump administration has declared open war on Congress’ constitutional authority to conduct oversight. And the Department of the Interior is no exception.**
- **To date, this Committee has made 25 formal requests for information or documents from Interior. And to date, we have only received complete or nearly complete responses to three of them. Fourteen of those requests—well over half—have received no substantive response at all.**
- **Interior likes to talk about the numbers of documents and pages they have sent us. But they’re padding the numbers. In one case, they gave us a 12,000-page printout of a single Excel table. It was unusable, as printouts of large**

spreadsheets usually are. And it was sitting on Interior's website. Rather than taking two months to print and scan 12,000 pages, they could have just emailed us the link.

- In response to our request about the former Secretary's review of our national monuments, they sent us 100 pages of unintelligible symbols. **[show visual]**
- We've gotten documents with redactions from Interior, while they sent the same documents to the public through FOIA without those redactions. When we asked them about it, staff told us that the redacted information wasn't related to our request. Not only was that not true, but Interior does not go through each individual document to redact content that isn't

responsive. The 100 pages of symbols make that pretty clear.

- Before **[you OR Secretary Bernhardt, depending on witness]** came to testify before this Committee in May, we tried to make things easy and asked **[you OR him]** to prioritize four very narrow document requests. One of those requests asked for a single document by file name. We couldn't even get that.
- Their efforts seem to be particularly targeted towards me. Emails obtained by the Committee this past Spring showed that Interior employees were instructed to withhold any communications directed to me for about two weeks. Another email said that after the two weeks, any documents I requested were to be reviewed by two high ranking political

**appointees. Just me. No other member of the House was singled out. Despite asking about these instructions multiple times, I still have not gotten answers.**

- It's not just Congress. Interior has resisted oversight by both the Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office, or GAO, since the beginning of this administration. In fact, the GAO has called Interior the least responsive department in the entire federal government.**
- When he testified before this committee, Secretary Bernhardt proposed that we meet to discuss a reasonable timetable for producing the documents we requested. At the meeting, DOI staff declared they would not be committing**

**to any timetables out of concern that we might hold them to their agreement.**

- They refused to tell us who their witness would be for this hearing until yesterday. 1-2 weeks is the norm.**
- These actions paint a picture of a department acting in bad faith.**
- Interior's refusal to cooperate means this Committee cannot do the oversight envisioned in our Constitution. We need information from the administration to assist us with legislation, oversight, and to keep the Department accountable to the American people.**

- **The American people deserve a government that works together better than this. I hope today's hearing helps us move past this logjam to find a path forward.**