

Vice Chair Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Committee on Natural Resources
Oversight Hearing

*Examining the Department of the Interior's Spending Priorities and the President's Fiscal Year
2021 Budget Proposal*

Good morning. And thank you to our witness, Assistant Secretary Susan Combs, for appearing at today's oversight hearing on the Interior Department's spending priorities and budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2021.

I am disappointed that Secretary David Bernhardt is not here today to defend the numerical and moral values embodied in his Department's budget. However, I am grateful to Assistant Secretary Combs for agreeing to loan us her experience and expertise.

We should be here today to begin the important, historic and deliberative process of negotiating a budget for the Department of the Interior for Fiscal Year 2021. We are not. This budget is not a serious opening offer. If enacted, the proposed cuts would be devastating.

The Trump administration is requesting another dramatic 16% cut for the Department of the Interior to its FY 2020 enacted budget.

Radical reductions to the National Park Service's and the Bureau of Land Management's land acquisition programs would virtually eliminate a portion of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a popular bipartisan program that was permanently authorized earlier this Congress. If enacted, these cuts would increase the backlog of maintenance in our Nation's Parks instead of reducing it. I hope my colleagues on the other side of the aisle who frequently speak about the need to reduce the backlog don't support this extreme cut.

We are asked to accept the lowest levels of funding, when adjusted for inflation, for both the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education in nearly two decades.

The budget continues to invest in a reorganization of Interior that purges institutional knowledge and experience, and leaves it more vulnerable to special interest influence. The proposed relocation of BLM is a good example.

Despite repeated requests, this committee has not seen an analysis of the problem that a relocation would solve. We haven't seen a real cost-benefit analysis. There has been no serious examination of potential impacts on taxpayers, employees and the agency.

The implementation of BLM's relocation would be embarrassing to most administrations.

In particular, the cuts to climate change action represent the opposite of what we need. Major cuts are proposed to programs at the U.S. Geological Survey, that are designed to help the country prepare for and manage the impacts of climate change. They include a 48% cut to species management research, a 64% cut for climate adaptation science centers, and a 30% cut to the water resources availability program.

In contrast, the energy and minerals program at USGS would see an increase.

In fact, the budget is again replete with gifts to the fossil fuel industry. Ten years after the *Deepwater Horizon* disaster spilled over 200 million gallons of oil into the ocean, the budget is attempting to cut the oil spill research program. And BLM is requesting a 19% increase for its Coal Management Program.

For my family, my friends, and my neighbors, dealing with climate change is an act of self-defense. The Northern Mariana Islands are already feeling the impacts with back-to-back typhoons, shoreline flooding, and the dying of our coral reefs. Adapting to the effects of climate change is not a choice for us; but we cannot do it alone. Nor should we have to. The people of the Marianas, the people of the insular areas, did not cause the climate crisis.

The budget proposes cuts totaling more than 20% to all the programs that the US-affiliated insular areas rely on. The cuts will have a devastating impact on areas that are dealing with stagnant or no economic growth, constrained budgets and the aftermath of catastrophic storms.

All this is happening as a new wave of science is telling us we have significantly underestimated the pace and severity of the climate crisis. The Department of Interior needs to step up, not stand down.

Ahead of this hearing, the Committee has provided Assistant Secretary Combs with several of the question topics that could be asked by some of the Committee Members here today, with the hopes that she will be able to provide complete and helpful answers. I look forward to her testimony and answers.