

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Alan S. Lowenthal
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Oversight Hearing on

Examining the Department of the Interior's Actions to Eliminate Onshore Energy Burdens

January 18, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here.

We're almost one full year into the Trump Administration, and unfortunately during that year we have seen a cascade of anti-environmental, anti-public health, and anti-taxpayer policies from the Department of Interior in the name of what they call "energy dominance."

They've never exactly defined that term, but over the past year we've seen very clearly what it means.

Energy dominance simply means letting the oil, gas, and coal industries do whatever they want, whenever they want, however they want on our public lands.

The Energy Burdens report developed by the Department in secret, behind closed doors, without any public input, reads like a wish list for the fossil fuel industries.

Many of these wishes have already been met. While the public has been fascinated by the dysfunction of the White House over the past year, one area where this Administration has been ruthlessly competent is in fulfilling the desires of Big Oil and Big Coal.

The BLM fracking rule, designed to set commonsense baseline standards for fracking on public lands, has been repealed.

The BLM methane rule, which would cut down on the waste of natural gas and improve taxpayer returns while also helping air quality, has been delayed multiple times with the likely intent to eventually kill it.

Even a technical rule dealing with how companies value oil, gas, and coal, which would have brought in an additional 78 million dollars for taxpayers each year, has been repealed.

The list goes on and on.

Meanwhile, there are serious questions about the way the Department of the Interior is carrying out its drilling-first agenda.

The Department has tried repealing multiple rules in contravention of the Administrative Procedures Act.

The Department is cancelling studies being conducted by the National Academies of Sciences, and not providing convincing explanations why, or an accounting of where the leftover money has gone.

The Secretary changes the offshore drilling plan with a tweet, in potential contravention of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act.

Data that used to be displayed on the BLM web site is not being updated.

And scores of letters from Congress remain unanswered.

All of these issues are ripe for serious oversight, yet unfortunately our oversight subcommittee only held six hearings last year, with only one witness from the Administration all year.

I don't think that's enough. We need to be conducting more oversight about the Department's operations, and hold more Administration witnesses accountable.

I am very glad that today we have the Acting Director of the Bureau of Land Management here, and tomorrow we will have the Acting Director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

Mr. Chairman, I hope we can keep that going, and also hold more hearings that fulfill this subcommittee's oversight responsibilities towards the Department of the Interior.

Along those lines, I ask unanimous consent to submit a letter from 49 environmental, sportsmen, and public interest groups asking the Natural Resources Committee to conduct more rigorous oversight of the Department of the Interior.

This administration has shown its true stripes over the past year: its top priority is doing everything the oil, gas, and coal industries desire.

What they have not shown any interest in, however, and is completely absent from the energy burdens report, is the desire for families to breathe clean air and have clean drinking water, the desires of sportsmen who wish to be able to continue to access public lands, and the desires of everyone who wants to see us protect fragile wild and special places and take action on climate change.

Also absent from the report is anything about burdens to renewable energy. I thought the report was supposed to look at all types of domestic energy, so perhaps I just haven't received those pages yet.

The administration pays lip service to conservation and renewable energy, but actions speak louder than words, and those actions have made their priorities crystal clear: everything that doesn't promote drilling or mining is simply a burden to be swept away.

I thank the witnesses for being here, and yield back the balance of my time.