

Opening Statement
Chairman Alan S. Lowenthal
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Oversight Hearing:
Examining the Policies and Priorities of BOEM, BSEE, and USGS
March 6, 2019

The Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources will come to order.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on the policies and priorities of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, and the United States Geological Survey.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member or their designees.

I ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5:00 pm today. [*pause*] Hearing no objection, so ordered.

This afternoon we were planning on hearing testimony from the Directors of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, and the U.S. Geological Survey, but unfortunately we will not hear from the Director of BSEE (pronounced "Bessie"), Scott Angelle (an-JELL), or the director of the U-S-G-S, Jim Reilly.

We sent invitations to Director Angelle and Director Reilly on February 8, nearly a full month ago, and the only reason we were given for them not being here today is that the Department did not want to.

While attending conferences and meetings before oil and gas executives, Director Angelle would give out his cell phone number, telling the industry representatives that he prefers to be called rather than emailed to avoid public disclosure requirements. So, naturally, I tried to give him a call earlier this afternoon to ask why he wasn't appearing before the committee.

But after ringing and ringing, no one picked up. Maybe he screens his calls and only answers for the oil and gas executives that he gave his number too?

We were given a similar non-answer for why Brian Steed, the Acting Director of the Bureau of Land Management, would not be testifying next Tuesday, and we just found out on Monday there will be no witness from the Office of Surface Mining, Reclamation, and Enforcement.

I thank Mr. Morris for being here from BSEE, and note that U-S-G-S has sent someone to answer questions about the budget.

Neither of them are political appointees responsible for setting policies and priorities across the entire agency. In fact, the Interior Department has flatly refused to send any of their political appointees at all, and has not given us a reason beyond, “we don’t want to.”

In an administration that has repeatedly disdained hard-working civil servants, and at a Department where the recently departed Secretary claimed that roughly one third of his employees were disloyal, it is particularly shameful to see the political leadership hide behind career employees.

As part of this committee’s oversight responsibilities, we will be inviting Director Angelle and Director Reilly to future hearings, and we will expect them to appear.

I am deeply concerned by the directions BOEM, BSEE, and U-S-G-S have taken under the Trump Administration and the lack of transparency they have shown the public and Congress.

As soon as this administration took over, these agencies saw their missions changed to supporting a misguided “energy dominance” strategy, which puts oil, gas, and coal first, while public health, worker safety, coastal economies, wildlife, recreation, and conservation come last.

A thoughtful five year offshore leasing program, finalized in January 2017, was replaced with a draft plan to expose our entire Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic coasts to the threat of offshore drilling.

At the same time, rollbacks were announced to safety regulations instituted in the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon disaster.

The director in charge of those rollbacks is supposed to be our nation’s top offshore cop and hold industry accountable for lapses in safety and environmental protection.

Instead, Director Angelle has referred to the oil and gas industry as “partners,” and encouraged those partners to call him on his cell phone so they wouldn’t generate a public record.

And as we will discuss later, this is not the only time in the past two years that BSEE has acted as though its primary responsibility is to protect the industry and shield them from public scrutiny, instead of making sure they are operating as safely as possible.

This is why today, Chairman Grijalva and I are sending a second letter to the Department of the Interior asking for Director Angelle’s cell phone records. This is necessary because the Department has not responded to the first letter, which was sent in November.

Democrats on this Subcommittee are committed to ensuring that federal agencies prioritize public health, community input, and environmental safeguards over corporate profits.

This hearing is our first opportunity to explore exactly what the priorities have been for these agencies over the past two plus years. It certainly will not be our last.

With that, I look forward to the testimony from our witnesses, and I now recognize Ranking Member Gosar for his opening statement.