

Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Chairman TJ Cox Opening Statement

Hearing titled, *No Roadmap, No Destination, No Justification: The Implementation and Impacts of the Reorganization of the Department of the Interior*

April 30, 2019

One of the first things Ryan Zinke did after becoming Secretary was to try to implement a massive solution in search of a problem. The weakness in that approach to reorganizing the 70,000-employee Department of the Interior became clear early in the process.

We have not seen data to show there is a problem. We have not seen data to prove that a reorganization was the way to solve the problem. Nor have we seen a cost benefit analysis or workforce planning data. No measurable goals. No comprehensive plan. That's worth repeating – a massive reorganization – and we have seen no plan. The Department has provided no monitoring plan to know if the reorganization is achieving its goals. We have not seen a timeline.

In 2018, the Government Accountability Office laid out what agencies need to do if they want their reorganizations to be successful. Unsurprisingly, their recommendations include all the basic considerations that I mentioned, which have not been provided by Secretaries Bernhardt or Zinke.

Before being elected to Congress last year, I owned a couple businesses and a community development organization. As a businessman, I can tell you with confidence that if I tried to tell company investors or shareholders that I was going to reorganize a company without showing them evidence of a need to do so or a way to measure success, *a plan*, I would be laughed out of the room.

And yet that is precisely the case at the Department of the Interior.

The actions that have been taken so far in the name of the reorganization have already had significant impacts. Starting in 2017, dozens of the most experienced, most effective employees were moved out of their positions, into positions for which they had no qualifications or interest, with very little notice. Most felt the moves were punitive or based on political ideology. The Office of the Inspector General was not able to determine whether the law was broken because documentation was so shoddy. These moves have lowered morale, created a culture of fear, and forced people and institutional knowledge out of the agency. That was perhaps not an accident.

About \$60 million of funding has been diverted for the reorganization at a time of major proposed cuts to the agencies. That kind of money could fund critical infrastructure projects for people in the Central Valley of California who desperately need clean drinking water. It could have helped a number of National Parks address their maintenance backlogs. It could have funded more than enough people to help Interior get rid of its FOIA backlog to allow the American people to know what their agency is doing.

To try to uphold our constitutional prerogative to provide oversight on this major undertaking, this committee has repeatedly sought information from Interior. We have repeatedly been denied. Most recently, we tried to make it as easy as possible for them. In March 2017, President Trump issued Executive Order 13781, directing the heads of each executive agency to submit to the Office of Management and Budget a reorganization plan within 180 days.

On April 10, Chairman Grijalva and I sent an official documents request to Interior, asking for that plan. Not all correspondence, not all records, not even two documents. Just one single document. We know it exists. We have the email that says it is ready for final delivery. We even gave Interior the file name of the document, so they didn't have to spend time looking for it: Agency Reform Plan – FINAL 9.12.17.PDF. I'm not sure how much easier and quicker we could make it. But we still don't have it.

If Secretary Bernhardt wants to implement the Zinke reorganization plan, he needs to start by providing Congress with a complete justification and a plan. He needs to work with Congress, this subcommittee, the American people, and Interior employees, instead of seeing us obstacles to overcome.

A reorganization can do a lot of good for an agency if it's done right. Let's work together to make sure it is.