

Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
Ranking Member Gohmert 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

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Thank you, Chairman Cox, for holding this hearing. And that -- for two reasons: first, because transforming the Department of the Interior is an important topic that does deserve additional congressional scrutiny; second, because this hearing falls completely within the jurisdiction of this Committee, which I hope will continue through the 116th Congress.

The reorganization of the Department of the Interior is just a small part in a larger effort of this Administration to overhaul the entire Federal Government to make it more efficient and effective. In fact, in the Department of the Interior, as the Chairman alluded to, there is a tremendous backlog of \$10 billion or more in simple maintenance repair with what property the Department of the Interior has. Yet in recent years the trend has been to acquire more and more property without even bothering to repair and maintain the property it had.

I welcome the reorganization. I think it is overtime that is -- past time that such should have been done. And it is consistent with the directive. March 2017 President Donald Trump issued Executive Order 13781, directing the head of each agency to submit reorganization plans in order to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of that agency.

In response to this executive order, former Secretary Ryan Zinke, when he was not having to answer claims against him that kept him busy and cost him a tremendous amount of individual money, he began undertaking bold reforms, modernizing the way the Department of the Interior operates. I am confident the new newly-confirmed Secretary, David Bernhardt, will be able to continue and complete the historic reorganization of the Department.

Ultimately, this reorganization will result in reduced bureaucratic redundancy, increased federal accountability, improve coordination between the federal government, State agencies, and local governments, while spending less money. I too look forward to seeing the reorganization plan.

The Department of the Interior has already made headway on this reorganization by transforming the past management structure of the Department, which consisted of 8 bureaus, 49 regions, each operating in a unique patchwork of boundaries, and to 12 unified regional boundaries based on watersheds and ecosystems.

This approach will allow the Department to move away from the one-size-fits-all solutions and focus resources on better serving their new regional boundaries. These new management plans will decrease redundancy while making coordination between different land management agencies more efficient.

Moving the decision-makers of the Department closer to the field will add an increased level of accountability not available within the current model of concentrating bureaucracy in D.C. Many decision-makers within the Department of the Interior are located thousands of miles away from the land and people that their decision will affect.

For example, the Bureau of Land Management oversees nearly 385,000 miles of public lands; 99 percent of this land is in western States and Alaska. Why should these lands continue to be managed by decision-makers inside this beltway?

While several details of the reorganization plan remain unconfirmed, I am afraid, based on the title of today's hearing, the majority merely intends to spend time criticizing and tearing down the plan. That said, I hope we don't miss the opportunity to truly explore how the Department of the Interior can evolve to better serve the American people, participate in a fruitful discussion.

Historically, agency reorganizations have not been a partisan issue. Many different agencies and bureaus have attempted reorganization plans throughout this Nation's history by both Republican and Democratic administrations. There is much that could be done to transform the Department of the Interior to better address the challenges it will face in the 21st century, and I am glad we are holding the hearing today to explore those options, and I look forward to hearing testimony today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.