

**Ranking Member Gohmert
Opening Statement
September 17, 2020**

**“Examining the Barriers and Solutions to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at
the Department of the Interior”**

- I do want to thank the witnesses for their participation today. I’m sorry you could not be here in person, but I look forward to hearing from you, and taking an honest look at where the problems stem from and discuss actual solutions.
- If we are to sincerely examine an issue, we need to objectively analyze how previous administrations and the current one have addressed these concerns.
- During his campaign, President Trump said he would choose the best people to staff his Administration.
- For the Department of the Interior, this has resulted in appointments that are historic “firsts” such as:
 - Brenda Burman as the first woman to lead the Bureau of Reclamation,
 - Tara Sweeney as the first Alaska Native and second woman to serve as the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, and
 - Aurelia Skipwith, as the first African American Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Dan Ashe, a former Fish and Wildlife Services chief, who served during the Obama Administration, praised Ms. Skipwith’s appointment saying, quote: “In a field where

diversity is sorely need, it is encouraging to see a woman and a person of color nominated to this important and prominent leadership position.”

- But, it is true that the demographics of the workforce at the Department of the Interior underrepresents minorities and women. These trends have been present throughout at least the past three administrations, including President Obama’s.
- The Office of Personnel Management published annual reports describing the makeup of the federal government’s workforce, including an analysis of the representation of minorities and women present at the executive departments.
- It is clear from these reports that the Department of the Interior has room to improve.
- For example, throughout nearly the last two decades, the Department of the Interior consistently had the lowest employment of black individuals when compared to other executive departments.
- However, in the same time period, the Department of the Interior also consistently had the second highest employment of American Indian/Alaska Native employees when compared to those same executive departments.
- The Department of the Interior is actively addressing issues related to the makeup of its workforce and raised the

importance of diversity, inclusion, and equity at the July meeting of its newly formed Workplace Culture Transformation Advisory Council.

- This Council was created under the Trump Administration in 2019 to effectuate positive changes across the Department of the Interior’s workplace environments.
- Of course, the Department of the Interior is not alone in its need to address diversity amongst its workforce.
- A study published by Dr. Taylor in 2014 examined close to 200 environmental organizations and her findings included the conclusion that minorities were underrepresented in the non-governmental environmental workforce.
- Ms. Tome also highlighted Dr. Taylor’s findings in her testimony, noting that in 2014 environmental nonprofits only employed about 12 percent of people of color.
- Perhaps – as Dr. Taylor’s testimony suggests – the bigotry present at the creation of some of our environmental institutions such as the national parks, hampered the ability for a more diverse agency today.
- Afterall, as Dr. Taylor described that among those who campaigned for the creation of national parks were eugenicists, such as Madison Grant. He published a book based on his racist views of “Nordic superiority” in 1916, the same year that another more well-known eugenicist,

Margaret Sanger, realized her vision through establishing Planned Parenthood.

- But if Madison Grant's extreme racist views as one of the founders of our parks has thwarted diversity today in government, it's disconcerting to think what his direct effect on his own organization was as a founder of the New York Zoological Society, known today as the Wildlife Conservation Society.
- As a co-founder of the Wildlife Conservation Society, which now grosses more than a quarter of a billion dollars annually, Madison Grant, of course, was even more well-known for his efforts to place a Congolese man on display alongside apes at the Bronx Zoo.
- Madison Grant was not alone in his views. His co-founder, Henry Fairfield Osborn, who also helped Grant create the American Eugenics Society, was a close friend of John Muir, a naturalist, environmental philosopher, and racist founder of the Sierra Club – another massive environmental organization which grosses more than 100 million dollars in revenue annually.
- What impacts have these racist founders had on the diversity, equity, and inclusion of our major environmental lobby today? Is it right for taxpayer dollars to support these or other environmental nonprofits with built-in systemic racism concerns?

- I hope our discussion today focuses on all the facts surrounding diversity and inclusion, including the acknowledgement of the positive steps taken under the Trump Administration and by others. Only then can we best discuss strategies to continue and build on the Department of the Interior's existing efforts.
- Thank you, I yield back.