

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

Examining Access to Oil and Gas Development on Federal Lands

June 29, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You know, we have been doing so well in our last few EMR hearings – they have been bipartisan, cooperative, and constructive. I hope that it is not coming to an end today.

Mr. Chairman, I don't oppose oil and gas development on public lands. But I do oppose letting the oil and gas industry call all the shots as to how to manage these lands owned by all Americans. It's only taken 5 months, and nearly every move on energy that this administration has made could have come right out of the executive boardrooms of the American Petroleum Institute or the National Mining Association.

And that might actually be the case, given the number of oil, gas, and coal lobbyists that now occupy high-ranking positions at the Interior Department, at the Energy Department, at the Environmental Protection Agency, and in the White House.

Rules to protect people's health? Gone.

Rules to protect our land, air, and water, and cut down on pollution? Gone.

Rules to protect fish and wildlife? Gone.

Rules to make sure companies are paying their fair share? Gone.

The standard seems to be: did the Obama Administration put it in place, and did one oil, gas, or coal company complain about it? If so, it has to go.

In no place is it more important to balance multiple uses—environmental protection as well as economic development—than on America's public lands. But this idea of balance – the idea that some areas should be protected while others can be developed – is gone.

To quote the statement of the Acting Assistant Secretary, "America's free markets will help determine where and when energy development on public lands is feasible."

That means the idea that these lands, which belong to all Americans, should be managed in a way that will ensure they are still here for our children and our grandchildren – that idea is gone.

Instead, the Administration is operating under the idea that the Department of the Interior should become a service station for the oil and gas industry.

Which lands would you like to lease? Where and how fast do you want to drill? What regulations do you want us to repeal? Are these national monuments getting in your way? Just let us know. The Department of the Interior is apparently here to keep you happy.

Secretary Zinke pays lip service to the idea of supporting all forms of energy, to being in favor of “All of the Above.” But his budget increases oil, gas, and coal programs by 34 million dollars while renewables suffer a 15.3 million dollar cut. In fact, the fossil fuel program increase seems to be the only one in the entire Interior Department budget.

We’ve seen this movie before. We’ve seen an administration where energy policy was literally written by Big Oil. During the eight years of the Bush administration, the only measure of success for the Bureau of Land Management was how many drilling permits it could issue.

What did we get? Interior Department officials thrown in jail. Regulators doing drugs and literally getting into bed with the people they were supposed to be regulating. And a thirst for mineral revenues that put safety standards on the back-burner and helped contribute to the *Deepwater Horizon*, according to the Presidential Oil Spill Commission.

When it comes to giving the keys to our public lands to the oil and gas industry, President Trump has made the Bush administration look bush league.

Look, the fact is that oil and gas companies are doing just fine on our public lands and in our oceans, despite the misleading statistics that are going to be thrown around today.

Here are some statistics: Oil production on public lands is up 59 percent since 2008. Offshore production is at a record high. Companies have more than 7,500 approved drilling permits they’re not using, and 26 million acres of public land under lease waiting to be developed.

But in our new quest for “energy dominance,” whatever that means, this is not going to be enough. Nothing is ever going to be enough.

Hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, biking, boating, off-roading, grazing, and all other uses of our public lands are now second-class. Oil and gas is dominant.

The oil barons want everything, and this administration is trying to serve it to them on a silver platter.

Mr. Chairman, we have an opportunity on this subcommittee to ensure that energy policies reflect the multi-use nature of our public lands, for the benefit of all our constituents, not just the special interests of a few billionaires. Let’s not squander that opportunity.

I yield back the balance of my time.