



FROM: Kountoupes Denham Carr & Reid

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RE: Senate Energy and Natural Resources Full Committee Hearing to Examine the President's Budget Request for the U.S. Department of the Interior for Fiscal Year 2026

Topline Summary

- Members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee convened to examine the President's FY26 budget request for the U.S. Department of the Interior
- In the hearing, members explored the potential of reallocating federal lands for affordable housing, energy development, and economic growth. Other key topics included the DOI's federal workforce reductions, permitting inefficiencies, energy dominance (including coal, oil, gas, and critical minerals), and wildfire preparedness. Budget concerns were also raised, especially around proposed cuts to the National Park Service and outdoor recreation programs.
- Republicans broadly supported Secretary Burgum's direction, praising his focus on energy independence, regulatory streamlining, and making unused federal land more available. They expressed frustration with the Biden administration's policies, especially regarding delayed lease sales, underutilization of domestic energy resources, and perceived federal overreach in land use decisions. Many Republicans pushed for revitalizing coal, oil, and gas industries and applauded the Secretary's efforts to cut bureaucratic overhead while expanding access for ranchers, miners, and outdoor recreation.
- Democrats were more skeptical of the administration's proposed land sales and budget cuts, advocating for transparency, stakeholder engagement, and adherence to long-established land management laws. They raised alarms about the potential dismantling of conservation programs and undermining of public land protections, emphasizing the economic and environmental importance of these areas. Many criticized DOI's budget priorities, particularly cuts to the National Park Service and climate research programs, and called for detailed plans before major staffing reductions occur.

Senators Attending: Chairman Mike Lee (R-UT), Ranking Member Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY), Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR), Sen. Steve Daines (R-MT), Sen. Angus King (I-ME), Sen. John Hoeven (R-ND), Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA), Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Sen. John Hickenlooper (D-CO), Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Sen. Catherine Cortez-Masto (D-NV), Sen. Jim Justice (R-WV), Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI)



[Live Hearing Link](#)

Meeting called to order by Chairman Mike Lee

Opening Statements

Chairman Mike Lee (R-UT):

Thanks for being here today, when we last heard from you as a committee back in January, you were President Trump's nominee to lead the Department at that time. You have since been confirmed and have now taken the reins at the Department of the Interior. And this Committee and ultimately the full Senate has since considered and confirmed Kate McGregor to be your deputy Secretary. This Committee has already favorably reported several additional nominees and senior positions within your Department, who are now pending on the Senate floor.

We encourage Senate leadership to bring those nominees to the floor quickly so that we can provide you with the personnel, the people you need to help you lead the Department in carrying out the important work that you do there on behalf of the American people for which we're very grateful. I just add, very honored to have supported you and thrilled with the work that you're doing so far. Last year, the Department of the Interior had a budget of \$16 billion. But our nation simply cannot fund on the scale that we have.

For decades we've spent money that we don't have and so we must borrow it often from our adversaries and saddle our children and even our grandchildren with that debt, much of which has been accumulated before, some of the people who must pay it back were even born or were old enough to vote. It's a form of taxation without representation. We generally frown on that in this country.

President Trump knows that and it shows in the budget that he sent to Congress by acknowledging limits on what can be spent a reality that every family, every business, every other organization in America deals with. On a daily basis, the budget that the President sent to Congress is a long overdue step in the right direction. Decades of unchecked federal spending have created structural deficits that now threaten our economic security and our ability to respond to real emergencies. President Trump's budget begins the challenging but essential work of turning that gargantuan ship around.

That work falls in part two, your Department Secretary Burgum from land and water management to energy and mineral development to partnerships with states, territories and local governments. The decisions made at Interior affect millions of Americans and shape the future of our public lands of our economy. And, of course, our national security. The Department has a hand in many things in in everything from infrastructure projects to mineral policies that either enable or block our ability to compete effectively with China.

It's responsible for stewarding vast tracts of land while supporting rural communities that depend on access to those same lands, for jobs, for housing, for growth, for energy for water, and many, many other things. In the best case, the Department of the Interior can serve as a partner to the



states and an enabler of prosperity in the worst case, it can become a bureaucratic gatekeeper that shuts out the voices of local communities. This administration is committed, of course to the former President Trump's budget sets clear expectations, get results, streamline operations, and stay focused on core responsibilities. That means resisting mission creep, reining in regulatory overreach and prioritizing the needs of working Americans over Washington's special interests.

I want to commend the recent opinion by the Department of Justice's Office of Legal Counsel which affirms what many of us have long argued that the President has legal authority to consider monument designations that are overbroad, duplicative or disconnected from the statutes stated purpose for nearly essentially, the federal government has often operated under a flawed interpretation of the Antiquities Act, one that allowed presidents to unilaterally lock up millions of acres of land but denied future presidents the authority to undo or even revise those designations. But as oil sees recent opinion discusses at length, there is actually a long history spanning decades of presidents reducing the size, previously designated national monuments or even designating them all together. With this new legal clarity, we hope that the Department of the Interior will work with us to ensure that public lands are managed in a way that reflects the needs of those who live closest to them. Today's hearing is about the kind of government we want to have and what it may take to achieve that.

It's about whether the Department is prepared to implement the President's agenda with the urgency and discipline that this particular moment in the history requires. So, we look forward to hearing from you and intend to align the department's operations with the President's budget, hearing how you intend to do those things and and how you will ensure that the Department of the Interior may plan to deliver on President Trump's agenda. So again, Mr. Secretary, welcome.

Ranking Member Martin Heinrich (D-NM):

Thank you, Chairman. We're here today to talk about the budget proposal of a Department that is quite frankly not being resourced to meet its mission. Parks are cutting hours and services for visitors. Ranger tours are canceled, toilets are overflowing and trash can sit on empty.

Permits are languishing on empty debts, energy projects are delayed or canceled. Contracts slowly wind their way through a Byzantine bureaucracy that was invented overnight. The senior leadership positions at the Department are mostly vacant.

Roughly 100 parks superintendent positions are vacant. Five of the seven regional Director positions for the National Park Service sit empty. At the Bureau of Land Management, about a third of senior leadership positions are vacant, including both Deputy Director positions and the Director position itself. And the frontline staff is in no better shape.

After promising to hire 7700 seasonal employees to serve Americans during their national in their national parks this summer, the Park Service has managed, at least according to public reports to hire only half of that. Memorial Day is gone. The Fourth of July is around the corner. And all of this has occurred before this budget request is put in place. Mr. Secretary, when you were going through the confirmation process, I believe that you would be a responsible steward of our public lands, conservative, of course, but responsible and with your experience in the



private sector and as a governor, I believe that you could rein in the sometimes reckless tendencies of DOGE, at least within the Department of Interior.

We're never going to agree on everything. But, I thought we could agree that our public lands are the greatest heritage of our nation, and we have a responsibility to hand them down to the next generation, well stewarded. This budget request will not resource your Department to responsibly steward our lands and waters. The proposal for the Interior Department operations next year includes a 30% cut across programs.

It's no exaggeration to say that this would cripple the Department as we know it. The cut to the park surface is paid for by getting rid of most parks system units that the national park system would have to lose more than 350 of its 433 units to swallow that kind of proposed cut. And yet, the Department has still not told us which units those might be. Any hope for speedier permitting system from the BLM has gone with a 35% proposed cut to that agency. Anyone who needs a recreation permit or right of way grazing lease will be left waiting.

That is not efficiency. The 35% Cut to the Bureau of Reclamation puts critical water infrastructure at risk of failing to safely deliver water to farmers, fish and people. The proposal completely eliminates the water SMART program that provides resources to local, often rural communities and water users to conserve water and to make efficiency improvements to their infrastructure, thereby reducing conflicts over the scarce resource. The nearly 40% cost cut to the US Geological Survey would kneecap the scientific research, we need to understand how our natural world is changing in the face of a click changing climate.

And the major reduction to the natural hazards program would leave communities more vulnerable to earthquakes, volcanoes and landslides. This proposal also completely eliminates the biological resources program at USGS, which could mean abandoning bird flu monitoring, closing the most advanced wildlife disease lab in the United States, and discontinuing research efforts for climate adaption. The USGS is migratory bird research also directly informs the Fish and Wildlife Service's bagged limits for migratory bird hunting seasons. Eliminating this research would hobble the management of migratory bird hunting seasons, one of the seven pillars of the North American model of wildlife conservation.

The foundation of wildlife management in the United States is scientific management. We cannot manage wildlife without wildlife science. The budget proposal also overturns the bipartisan work of this Committee in 2020, to pass the great American Outdoors Act signed into law by this President. Instead of supporting reauthorization of this great accomplishment this budget robs the Land and Water Conservation Fund in order to pay for deferred maintenance projects.

And lastly, but most importantly, this budget request, if implemented, would cause irreparable harm to Indian country, with 30 plus percent cuts to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education. This budget represents a dereliction of the of every treaty obligation this country has to tribes and their members. This proposal even cuts the VAs public safety account, belying any claim that this administration might try to make that it cares for the safety of people



in Indian country. Mr. Secretary, you promised to prioritize the needs of Indian country in your time leading this Department.

But this budget simply doesn't give you the resources to be able to effectively accomplish that. I think we need to do better, which I say out of respect for you and our shared values. It is often said of president's budget requests that they're dead on arrival on Capitol Hill, and for the sake of the shared landscapes that we hold in trust for our grandchildren. I hope that's the case for this budget.

Witnesses

The Honorable Doug Burgum, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior

Testimony

Q&A

Chairman Mike Lee (R-UT) began by talking about how there is a housing crisis in many of the western states and that one of the ways it can be addressed is by utilizing federal lands. He said that the federal government holds 70% of lands out west and that we need to make a percentage of that available for affordable housing. He said that President Trump has said that they planned on using some of this unused federal land. He then mentioned his HOUSES Act which follows through on this. He said that just 1% of the unused federal land could be impactful in addressing the housing crisis. Secretary Burgum agreed and said that the 1% amounts to 6.87 million acres. He said that himself and the HUD Secretary were in Las Vegas working on some federal land sales and talked about how he was at a 40 acre site there that the government was selling to create more affordable housing, and that just that acreage of barren land provided \$16 million in revenue for the federal government. He also mentioned an 80 acre lot of barren land along a highway that was able to be used for affordable housing. He said that in Utah specifically, they have had 2 land swaps from federal to state control, allowing states to use this land more productively. He said that we have a lot of untapped land resources that can be extremely helpful at lowering the cost of housing. Chairman Lee then addressed the maintenance backlog that has been going on at the DOI, specifically under the previous administration. He said that the DOI should be taking care of already owned land before acquiring new land. Secretary Burgum agreed. He said he wanted to add that sales from this unused land can go towards recreation and other department projects that benefit the public. Chairman Lee thanked Secretary Burgum for his work.

Ranking Member Martin Heinrich (D-NM) began by stating that it was unclear to him which federal lands were being considered for these sales. He asked what kind of criteria the Department was looking at when considering which federal lands to sell. Secretary Burgum answered that they look for places with low value land in high growth areas. He said that these lands lack natural resources and are not designated conservation areas. He said they are finding that states that meet all of this criteria the best are Idaho, Alaska, Utah and Nevada. Ranking Member Heinrich said he wanted to ensure that the land was not used for any conservation purposes. He said that if it is the case that they are engaging in these federal land sales, they need to make sure there is engagement with the public so that those in the communities are able to provide input. Secretary Burgum answered yes, and confirmed that they are not selling land of



significant value. The Ranking Member then told the Secretary that there is already a framework in place for BLM to conduct this process. He said that the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act is a law that provides a framework for all federal lands sale going towards recreation, conservation and housing projects. The Ranking Member asked Secretary Burgum whether he knew this framework existed and whether they were utilizing that model in this process. Secretary Burgum answered that they were looking at all models. The Ranking Member urged him to look into that already existing model. He then shifted to federal workforce downsizing, asking the Secretary what sites would be affected by the NPS workforce reductions. Secretary Burgum said that it wasn't that there would necessarily be reduced staffing at these sites, it was that there was too much overhead and potentially too much NPS staff working outside the sites in places like Washington D.C. He mentioned that as Governor of North Dakota he was able to reduce spending in that area by 27% and still yielded the same results. Ranking Member Heinrich said that he wanted to see a clear plan on how they would adjust with these cuts and asked the Secretary whether this was something he could provide this week. Secretary Burgum answered that the department would need more time to put a plan like that together and that it was tough for them to create this when so many of the systems are outdated and don't provide accurate data.

Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY) started by talking about how the process of leasing federal lands and getting permits approved was a disaster under the Biden administration. He asked the Secretary how the department plans on correcting course. Secretary Burgum answered that they need to start by reversing activity that is not following the law. He said that there were many lease sales that should have gone through under the Biden administration by law that did not. He said that one of the things that they are working on is a transparency dashboard for permits. He said that they want to help the public understand all of the red tape that is bogging down these important projects. He said that they recently found that an environmental assessment could be done in less than 14 days and EIS in less than 28 if they were maintaining proper efficiency. He said that people think these reviews take awhile, but the reality is that the paperwork often just gets left untouched for months. He said that with more clear deadlines it is easier to expedite and streamline the process. He then talked about how they are permitting new mining operations in Wyoming right now and that they got one approved in Montana. He said that we need to get back into the mining game. Sen. Barrasso said that the BLM under the Biden administration finalized Rock Springs Resource Managing right at the end of Biden's term. He said that this was devastating to southeastern Wyoming and wondered what the department was doing to fix this. The Secretary agreed and said actions like this were egregious. He said that this was an attempt to strip forms of land use. He said that we need to get back to following the law and prevent "heavy-handed" government. Sen. Barrasso then talked about all of the valuable work that USFS does for Wyoming and asked whether all of the staff are present. Secretary Burgum answered that they are working on making sure it is fully staffed. Sen. Barrasso then expressed concern that after 15 years of Wyoming's species preservation management plan for sage-grouse, the Biden administration tried locking 600,000 acres. He asked whether DOI will reopen the greater sage-grouse management plan. Secretary Burgum answered that they were working on this and noted that sage-grouse are not an endangered species, so this action by the Biden administration was completely unjustified. He said that they are taking a hard look at this and making sure all laws are being followed.



Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) said that when he last spoke with Secretary Burgum, it seemed like he didn't know much about the Clean Energy Tax Law that the Senator wrote. He said that he believes the current administration is making an unforced error, noting that the House budget bill is taking clean energy completely off the table. He explained to the Secretary that energy company executives with gas assets have been coming to him saying that they need renewables as a complementary power source in their operations. He said that he wants to work with his colleagues to fix this and asked the Secretary if he would work with them on "cleaning" the House bill. Secretary Burgum said that he would love to learn more about this. Sen. Wyden said that it is clear that renewables are still needed. The Secretary said that he believes the House bill prioritizes reliable and affordable energy and recognizes that renewables are intermittent and expensive. Sen. Wyden said that there aren't any mandates on clean energy. He said that this sentiment is coming from the mouths of executives of companies that utilize fossil fuels. He then moved onto the issue of workforce reductions within the NPS. He said that we need to continue preserving and mentioned that he had been hearing of decreased quality of management of Crater Lakes in Oregon ever since the cuts had been taking place. He asked the Secretary if he was committed to making sure that Oregon parks are fully staffed. Secretary Burgum answered that he absolutely would and is happy to work with the Senator on this. Sen. Wyden then moved onto the issues of wildfires in the west. He said that with increased heat expected in the coming summer months he is concerned about how the hiring freeze will impact the amount of firefighters available to deal with these fires. Secretary Burgum answered that there is no hiring freeze for firefighters. He said that staffing levels for firefighters are identical to the levels in 2024, and he is happy to look at any discrepancies in Oregon. Sen. Wyden said that his door is always open for working with the Secretary, reiterated that markets and companies like clean energy and said that he thinks we can do better.

Sen. Steve Daines (R-MT) began by talking about how there are 3 major coal mines in Montana. He expressed his enthusiasm that Secretary Burgum would be bringing these mines back on track. He said that of these three, the Spring Creek and Bull Marathon mines have approved permits, which is a sigh of relief for Montana. He added that there was extensive public input on these decisions. He said that the third project, the Rosebud Coal Mine is still waiting on their permit and he is hoping to get it soon. Sen. Daines asked Secretary Burgum to talk about how he is supporting "made-in-America" energy and work in Montana like that of the Rosebud Coal Mine. Secretary Burgum said that he is happy to help on this and emphasized the importance of providing reliable, affordable power to the grid. He said that this provides opportunities for everyone, especially in rural communities in states like Montana. He said that the DOI is trying to work with all 50 states on this but acknowledged that some states like Montana are much more receptive than others. Sen. Daines thanked him for his work. Secretary Burgum then emphasized that in addition to coal, critical minerals are absolutely essential for our national security. Sen. Daines said that the America the Beautiful Act that both he and Senator King have collaborated on intends to reauthorize the NPS Public Lands and Restoration Fund which is about to expire. He said that it addresses the deferred maintenance problem and said he hopes the Secretary will work with him and Senator King on this. Secretary Burgum answered yes.



Sen. Angus King (I-ME) began by expressing his disappointment with the proposed NPS budget for FY26. He said that the insufficient data and details that were provided is an insult to Congress. He said that all that was provided was a vague “efficiency” justification, and that a 37% cut to an already underfunded agency is completely irresponsible. He said that in the entire government’s budget, this amounts to almost nothing, saving virtually no money while devastating America’s treasures. He said that there is huge damage with very little return and asked Secretary Burgum why on earth they would do this. Secretary Burgum said that the 37% number is the reduction in full time staff, however it does not account for part time and seasonal staff, in which they have a lot of. He said right now, there are more seasonal employees than full time employees because they are trying to do more flexible staffing. He said that the raw number is not everything. Sen. King said that he still doesn’t understand gutting the budget, mentioning that it happens to be the most popular federal agency. Secretary Burgum explained that they are looking at reducing excess NPS staff in places like Washington DC and increasing staff on site, Sen. King said he wants to see a clear plan before a 37% cut goes into effect. Secretary Burgum said that you can find savings in every agency and still deliver with a more reasonable budget. He said that while it may not be a significant percentage of the budget, 1 billion dollars is not a small number. Sen. King said part of the NPS’s responsibility includes stewardship and resource management, staff which are often times not on site. He suggested that if the administration truly wants to reduce waste, \$600 million of that \$1 billion could be covered by better tax enforcement at the IRS.

Sen. John Hoeven (R-ND) began by talking about how he likes Secretary Burgum’s approach of providing better service while still finding savings. He also acknowledged that the Secretary is also Chairman of the NEDC and said that he is “all in” on energy dominance. He asked the Secretary what he is doing to unleash oil, gas and coal on federal lands to not only meet energy demand but also partner with allies and reduce dependence on foreign adversaries. Secretary Burgum thanked him for championing energy policy and said that the administration realizes the challenge we are facing. He said that we currently have an insecure supply chain and that the Biden administration failed to follow through on lease sales for petroleum reserves. He added that we need to get back into the mining business, need to boost our critical mineral supply chain and usher back in record capital investment into the country. Sen. Hoeven said that there is a plant in North Dakota that will be processing nickel and told Secretary Burgum that he will continue to advocate for lower taxes and regulations to be energy dominant. Sen. Hoeven then asked the Secretary what he can do for ranchers on federal lands. The Secretary answered that they are working on speeding up grazing permits and building up a permitting transparency dashboard. Sen. Hoeven expressed his enthusiasm for this and Secretary Burgum added that they were also working on increasing access for hunting and fishing.

Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA) began by expressing his hope that the Secretary visits the area in California known as “Lithium Valley”. He then talked about how the DOJ published information that says the President can abolish national monuments and asked the Secretary what their intentions were with California monuments. Secretary Burgum said that he would appreciate the opportunity to visit Lithium Valley and said he needs to look at the recent monument additions. He said that he has heard that some DOI staff were never consulted on these newer monuments and that they need to take a balanced approach. Sen. Padilla said that we need to make sure the



public is also engaged. He then began discussing the Department of Reclamation. He said that they lost 1400 public servants, with the finance staff in California's Sacramento office being cut from 50 to just 12, or almost 80%. He said that we need to make sure to look at whether there is sufficient finance staff to meet the needs of critical water infrastructure investments. Secretary Burgum said that he is unsure about the 80% number for the cuts, but does know that they have been trying to unify the state offices by bringing some of the finance, HR and IT staff into the Secretary's office. Sen. Padilla said that if this is the case, he would like more specifics on what their new roles look like. He added that reclamation is especially important for all of the states in which the Colorado River passes through. He then said he would submit questions to the record on the U.S. Geological Survey.

Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS) expressed strong support for Secretary Burgum's leadership in revitalizing offshore energy development, which she emphasized is crucial for states like Mississippi along the Gulf of Mexico. She praised the administration's reversal of previous lease sale restrictions, highlighting the importance of offshore oil and gas leasing for national energy dominance and coastal restoration. Sen. Hyde-Smith underscored the value of programs like the American Battlefield Protection Program, which supports key historic sites such as Vicksburg Military Park, and asked about continued funding commitments. Secretary Burgum affirmed the Department's dedication, explaining that revenues from offshore resource development, distinct from tax income, play a pivotal role in funding both coastal restoration and historical preservation. The discussion also touched on critical mineral exploration in the Gulf, where Sen. Hyde-Smith cited Ole Miss's ongoing research contributions. Secretary Burgum emphasized the strategic need for domestic access to these minerals, noting partnerships with universities and the private sector are vital. He stressed the urgency of reducing reliance on China for rare earth processing, calling it a top national priority.

Sen. John Hickenlooper (D-CO) began by expressing his concerns around proposed budget cuts affecting public lands and outdoor recreation. He voiced concern over language in the budget referencing a "bloated federal estate" and the significant 60% reduction in the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) recreation budget compared to pre-COVID levels, highlighting that such lands fuel a \$70 million industry in Colorado and \$1.2 trillion nationally. He emphasized the risks of cutting beyond "fat" and into "necessary" resources, urging smarter investments to sustain public access and environmental stewardship. Secretary Burgum acknowledged these concerns, applauding Sen. Hickenlooper's data-driven approach and agreeing that outdoor recreation is vital, contributing roughly 3% to national employment. Secretary Burgum discussed efforts to evaluate cuts more strategically, consolidate firefighting operations, and maintain staffing for wildfire response, pointing to cooperation models like Alaska's and pending legislation aimed at boosting efficiency. The two agreed to continue collaborating, especially around shared priorities like wildlife conservation, hatchery operations, and wildfire resilience in Colorado.

Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) expressed deep frustration over the Biden administration's handling of offshore oil and gas leasing in the Gulf of Mexico, describing it as so mishandled that it seemed deliberate. He emphasized the importance of regular, predictable lease sales, not only for American energy security but also for the well-paying jobs they sustain in Louisiana and



nationwide. Secretary Burgum responded by affirming that restoring a consistent lease schedule is a top priority, targeting a new sale by December. He stressed that predictability helps retain investment in U.S. energy production rather than losing capital to overseas ventures. Secretary Burgum highlighted the U.S.'s global leadership in clean and safe energy production, asserting that reliable lease schedules are essential to domestic prosperity and environmental responsibility. The conversation shifted to deep-sea mining, where Sen. Cassidy raised concerns about America losing strategic ocean tracts due to its failure to ratify the Law of the Sea treaty. Secretary Burgum acknowledged the challenge, noting that while America has ceded critical mineral refining dominance to China, technological innovation, especially in low-impact ocean mining, offers a path forward. He signaled that the federal government is elevating the issue to a national priority, aiming to secure critical mineral supply chains and reduce reliance on geopolitical adversaries. Sen. Cassidy closed by highlighting Louisiana's role in global energy expertise, affirming his state's readiness to lead in these emerging frontiers.

Sen. Catherine Cortez-Masto (D-NV) began by voicing concerns around the Trump administration's approach to federal land sales in the West, particularly in Nevada. While thanking Secretary Burgum for past collaboration and for recognizing the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) as a successful model, she voiced strong concerns that the administration's current direction, especially through the pending reconciliation package, contradicts that very model. Sen. Cortez-Masto criticized proposed land sales that target remote, infrastructure-less desert areas in Clark County, arguing that these parcels are useless for addressing urgent housing and development needs. She emphasized that SNPLMA's strength lies in its stakeholder-driven process and its reinvestment of proceeds back into local land and community improvement, something the current proposal ignores in favor of deficit reduction. When asked, Secretary Burgum acknowledged that a proposal to sell up to 2 million acres of federal land across the West may be forthcoming, but clarified that no formal plan has been introduced and that he is not actively involved in reconciliation negotiations. Sen. Cortez-Masto pushed further, highlighting the need for transparency and engagement with local stakeholders, especially in a state where over 80% of land is federally owned. She concluded by stressing that this isn't a partisan attack but a call for the administration to practice what it preaches and work collaboratively to uphold the SNPLMA model, ensuring land policy serves Nevadans, not federal budget goals.

Sen. Jim Justice (R-WV) offered a passionate endorsement of Secretary Burgum, praising him as an ideal leader for the Department of the Interior, highlighting his experience as a governor, businessman, rancher, and outdoorsman. Sen. Justice emphasized the overwhelming scope of Secretary Burgum's responsibilities, spanning everything from land sales to environmental conservation, and commended him as the "pick of the litter" among Cabinet secretaries. Shifting focus to energy policy, Sen. Justice criticized the Biden administration's impact on the coal and gas industries, likening it to a "Democratic water torture," and warned of a looming national energy crisis. He then turned to a key concern in the Interior budget: wildland firefighting. Secretary Burgum responded with urgency and detail, recounting a devastating wildfire during his governorship where delayed federal aerial support, despite available aircraft, led to fatalities and massive destruction. He outlined a proposed solution which included unifying the wildfire response structure by consolidating five federal firefighting groups under one command to



improve response times, coordination, and use of technology. Secretary Burgum stressed that faster mobilization not only saves lives and property but also reduces costs in the long run. Sen. Justice closed by urging his colleagues to support Secretary Burgum's strategic approach, calling him a capable, thoughtful leader who is exactly what the country needs at this moment.

Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA) pushed back on Secretary Burgum's proposed budget approach to public lands, particularly criticizing its apparent departure from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) mandate. Emphasizing Washington State's \$22 billion outdoor economy and 200,000+ jobs tied to public lands, Sen. Cantwell reminded Secretary Burgum that Congress had overwhelmingly passed, and President Trump signed, legislation making LWCF funding permanent, with a clear legal requirement: 40% of those funds must be used for land acquisition, not land sales. She stressed that this bipartisan effort had put to rest the old argument of choosing between infrastructure repair and land expansion. Secretary Burgum responded by affirming his commitment to follow the law but suggested balancing acquisition (especially strategic infill purchases) with other priorities. Sen. Cantwell wasn't convinced, noting that the proposed budget sends the opposite signal, and warned it could undermine a major national economic engine. Shifting to wildfires, Sen. Cantwell also raised urgent concerns about the ongoing fire in Kittitas County (KLM), asking for better coordination between DOI and USFS. She called for immediate, concrete action to support communities already facing the growing threat, urging Secretary Burgum for a direct response and stronger interagency cooperation.

Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI) expressed her concerns with Secretary Burgum and the broader administration for what she described as the dismantling of government services, particularly through mass personnel cuts across federal agencies. She expressed frustration that Secretaries like Secretary Burgum were expected to answer for decisions they weren't consulted on, specifically, the firing or early retirement of key DOI staff, including in Hawaii, where critical positions such as park superintendents and law enforcement chiefs have been left vacant. Sen. Hirono requested a full accounting of all DOI positions vacated since January 20, including locations, titles, and justifications, and secured Secretary Burgum's commitment to provide that information and return for follow-up questioning. She then pivoted to concerns over climate-related programs, noting that USGS Climate Adaptation Science Centers had been "indefinitely paused," a term she interpreted as signaling their likely demise. She then asked whether the administration had directed agencies to remove references to climate change, citing a broader ideological resistance. Secretary Burgum responded that a comprehensive review of over 36,000 contracts and grants was underway, asserting that some recipient organizations were so heavily dependent on federal funds that they resembled extensions of the government itself. Sen. Hirono closed by requesting a breakdown of which of those contracts specifically dealt with climate change, suggesting that any credible review should be able to identify them.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) praised Secretary Burgum for his active engagement in Alaska, acknowledging his visits across the state and his attention to local concerns, particularly regarding the President's executive order and staffing issues. She expressed appreciation for his efforts to decentralize federal personnel from Washington and asked for a detailed list of staffing losses in the BLM, Forest Service, and National Park Service since the new administration began. Sen. Murkowski also raised concerns about the proposed consolidation of 11,000



wildland firefighters into a new DOI Wildland Fire Service, which would eliminate the Forest Service's wildfire program. While not opposing the concept, she emphasized the need to assess its effects on Alaska's unique interagency fire coordination, particularly with the Alaska Fire Service and tribal partners, as the state enters fire season. In response, Secretary Burgum framed the plan as a strategic unification, not a relocation, stressing the goal of better coordination, efficiency in resource deployment, and unified leadership, especially across aircraft operations. He pointed to successful models in Boise's National Interagency Fire Center and Alaska's own integrated system as templates, and underscored the importance of standardizing pay, benefits, and technology across agencies. Sen. Murkowski concluded by supporting a pragmatic approach that builds on existing partnerships.

Sen. King briefly made a comment that while he disagrees with the Secretary on the NPS, he appreciates his work on unifying the fire service.

Ranking Member Heinrich emphasized the importance of leveraging existing federal laws such as the FLPMA and the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, to dispose of isolated federal land parcels near urban areas for housing, while simultaneously using the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to expand public access for hunting, fishing, and conservation. He noted that this dual approach allows for balanced land management but expressed concern over the absence of the administration's LWCF project priority list, which is typically submitted by this time of year. Ranking Member Heinrich urged the administration to provide that list promptly to ensure alignment with both laws.

Chairman Lee brought the hearing to a close