



**FROM:** Kountoupes Denham Carr & Reid

**DATE:** Monday, April 20, 2026

**RE:** House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Budget Hearing on the U.S. Department of Interior

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### **Topline Summary**

- Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies convened to discuss the FY 2027 budget of the U.S. Department of the Interior with Secretary Doug Burgum.
- Democrats raised concerns over workforce reductions and budget cuts impacting the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Indian Affairs, while also pushing back on the administration's approach to offshore wind and clean energy investment and urging greater environmental protections.
- Republicans largely supported Sec. Burgum's priorities, emphasizing domestic energy dominance, critical minerals development, public land access, permitting reform, and strengthening tribal partnerships and law enforcement in Indian Country.
- Members from both parties found common ground on addressing the murdered and missing Indigenous persons crisis, tackling the national parks maintenance backlog, and ensuring adequate resources for the upcoming wildfire season.

**Members Attending:** Chairman Mike Simpson (R-ID), Ranking Member Chellie Pingree (D-ME), Full Committee Chairman Tom Cole (R-OK), Full Committee Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Rep. Celeste Maloy (R-UT), Rep. Mark Amodei (R-NV), Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN), Rep. Guy Reschenthaler (R-PA), Rep. Josh Harder (D-CA), Rep. Michael Cloud (R-TX), Rep. Jim Clyburn (D-SC), Rep. Ryan Zinke (R-MT), Rep. Jake Ellzey (R-TX)

### **[Live Hearing Link](#)**

*Meeting called to order by Chairman Simpson*

### **Opening Statements**

**Chairman Mike Simpson (R-ID):** This afternoon I'd like to welcome the Secretary of the Interior, Doug Burgum. I would also like to welcome and thank Congressman Tom Cole for joining us today in his role as full committee chair. Chairman Cole is the first Native American to ever chair the Appropriations Committee and continues to be a champion for Indian Country and a great supporter of this subcommittee.

Mr. Secretary, it's a pleasure to see you again before this subcommittee. You and I had a chance to meet recently, and I enjoyed hearing about your first year as Secretary of the Interior and about your continued commitment to improving the Department in service of the American people.



Our hearing today will address the Fiscal Year 2027 budget priorities for the Department of the Interior and provide you with an opportunity to share some accomplishments and outline your goals for this fiscal year. I look forward to hearing more about your work on reshaping the agency with a focus on producing domestic energy, securing critical minerals, and promoting and expanding recreational and commercial access to healthy and productive public lands. And to hearing more about the ways in which we can continue to prioritize our treaty and trust obligations throughout Indian Country.

For Fiscal Year 2027, the President’s budget requests roughly \$15 billion for Department of the Interior programs under this subcommittee’s jurisdiction. Today’s discussion helps inform our budget review process. It helps us gain a fuller understanding of your priorities and vision for the future of the Department – and for us to share our priorities and grapple with areas where we may disagree.

One of the priorities of this subcommittee – under both Republican and Democratic leadership – is upholding and fulfilling our Tribal treaty and trust responsibilities. We look forward to continuing to work together to direct funding to Tribes’ greatest needs, including healthcare, education, law enforcement, and community and economic development.

Finally, no discussion of this budget would be complete without mentioning our wildland fire fighters. I look forward to hearing more about the Department’s strategies and funding levels needed to support them in their fight to keep our communities safe and protect our forests. Secretary Burgum, thank you again for joining us this afternoon.

**Ranking Member Chellie Pingree (D-ME):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Secretary. I truly appreciate you being here today, and I also want to thank you for your recent trip to Maine. I know it was greatly appreciated by the parks, the tribes, and others you were able to meet with. However, after a year of observing this administration and its impact on our country, I have some very deep concerns.

The Department of the Interior is supposed to protect and manage our natural resources, uphold our trust and treaty obligations, and follow the science. Instead, from my perspective, this administration is bending the department’s mission to serve the interests of oil and gas companies. Its policies are allowing unfettered consumption of natural resources across the country. We saw this clearly in the Gulf of Mexico, where last month the administration convened the so-called “God Squad” and approved an extraordinary exemption from Endangered Species Act protections for offshore drilling. That decision would be alarming enough on its own, but it is even more disturbing coming from an administration that seems determined to weaken every safeguard standing in the way of industry profits.

Speaking of those safeguards, sixteen years ago today, the Deepwater Horizon explosion killed 11 workers and devastated the Gulf in the largest and most destructive oil spill in American history. In the wake of that disaster, investigations found that employees had inappropriately close ties to oil and gas companies, and the agency was ultimately broken up because its oversight model had failed so badly. Yet this budget proposes reviving that same disgraced structure, potentially returning us to a model of corruption that jeopardized both worker safety and the environment.

The administration has also taken dramatic steps to block renewable energy development—eliminating competition for oil and gas while reducing overall energy production at a time when our country’s energy needs are growing. Shortly after taking office, the White House moved quickly to halt offshore wind development and took steps to rein in solar and wind projects. Why are we kneecapping industries that create jobs, expand our energy supply, and help address the climate crisis?



This administration's energy policy appears driven by political grievance, ideological hostility, and a desire to prop up big oil and gas. We also know there has been a persistent hostility toward wind energy. Although the courts vacated the president's wind moratorium and blocked efforts to halt five current leases, the administration took the unprecedented step of spending nearly \$1 billion in taxpayer money to coerce a private company into abandoning offshore wind projects.

Now we know the administration's public justification for that deal does not hold up. Newly disclosed settlement terms show the company was not required to make any new investment in American oil and gas production. Instead, it could simply claim credit for spending it had already planned, including fossil fuel projects already underway. This makes the deal even more troubling: taxpayer dollars are being used to reward a company for abandoning clean energy while simultaneously propping up further oil and gas development—at a time when families are already being hammered by high energy costs.

Americans are struggling with rising utility bills and higher gas prices. Yet this administration chose to spend nearly \$1 billion not to build affordable energy, but to eliminate it. These decisions benefit industry at the expense of the American people, who are now paying an average of \$4.04 per gallon of gas. According to the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, gas prices could peak at \$4.36 per gallon, costing the average household an additional \$740 this year. It makes no sense to actively sabotage renewable energy when we know it is a more affordable option for families.

To be candid, this makes me very angry. I don't usually speak this long, but the stakes demand it. These policies are contributing to an affordability crisis, and there appears to be a lack of focus on the department's actual mission. It seems the White House has you distracted with duties unrelated to serving as Secretary of the Interior. For example, what does retrieving a case of gold from Venezuela have to do with the department's mission?

Meanwhile, our national parks are deteriorating, staff are stretched thin, and this budget proposes to further gut them with a 32% cut. Science should be at the core of the department's decisions, yet this proposal eviscerates the U.S. Geological Survey—a vital research agency—with a 66% reduction. It also abandons our trust and treaty obligations to Native Americans, slashing the Bureau of Indian Affairs by 27% and Indian education by 32%.

I have been appalled watching this administration decimate the department's workforce, and this budget appears to deliver a final blow. The department is on a dangerous course, and this proposal would only deepen the damage. As the ranking member of the subcommittee, I will do everything in my power to oppose these reckless cuts and fight these destructive policies.

I hope you will put politics aside, listen to the serious concerns raised here today, and take immediate steps to steer the department back onto a safer and more responsible course. Thank you again for being here. I look forward to your answers, and I yield back.

**Full Committee Chairman Tom Cole (R-OK):** Thank you, Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree, for holding this hearing. Secretary Burgum, welcome, and thank you for testifying before the subcommittee on the Administration's budget proposal for the Department of the Interior for Fiscal Year 2027.

Over the past year, this White House has worked with urgency to remake the federal bureaucracy and rebalance America's natural resource policies. Cutting red tape fuels opportunity and enhances our competitiveness. I believe in our ability to innovate and work together to achieve shared conservation



goals while preserving the economic vitality of our communities. When we make the right, strategic federal investments, and govern effectively, those resources pay dividends in the form of stable economic growth and the creation of good-paying jobs.

To that end, I appreciate Secretary Burgum's efforts to implement strategic reforms at the Department of the Interior. I look forward to hearing about what you have been able to accomplish and about your vision for the future of the agency as we begin the FY27 appropriations process—informed by your experiences in your first year as Secretary.

You are doing important work. The Department manages our beloved national parks and conserves our public lands to keep them healthy and productive for future generations. The agency plays a critical role in upholding the government's Tribal trust and treaty responsibilities—work that is of the utmost importance to me personally. It is imperative that these programs are supported by budget requests that reflect their importance and impact on communities.

Our trust and treaty obligations are national commitments to be honored. Tribes already do their best with limited resources, and further reductions in funding for services and self-governance have real and serious consequences in Indian Country. That is why it is paramount that thorough and proper tribal consultations are conducted when changes to programs are proposed that would impact delivery of services.

I look forward to hearing more about agency plans to support these programs and improve efficiencies and upholding these sacred responsibilities. Thank you for being here today, Secretary Burgum. We will continue to work with you collaboratively on executing your agency's mission and ensuring constituent needs are met. With that, I yield back.

**Full Committee Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member Pingree, for holding this hearing. Mr. Secretary, thank you for being with us today and for your testimony. I look forward to our questions and your responses.

The American people increasingly sense that this administration is out of touch. While the cost of living continues to climb—while the prices of gas, groceries, utilities, and everyday goods rise higher and higher—this administration appears to be asleep at the wheel. There seems to be little understanding of what the American people need or want. That disconnect is clearly reflected in the proposed budget for the Department of the Interior.

Rather than addressing the problems that are actually impacting people's lives, the administration is proposing to slash billions of dollars from programs that protect wildlife, maintain public lands, and promote clean energy—programs that enjoy broad public support. The National Park Service, for example, is one of the most popular government agencies in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center, 76% of Americans have a positive view of the agency. The public is rightly enamored with the natural beauty our country is blessed with and strongly supports the work the National Park Service does to maintain and protect our public lands.

Yet the proposed budget cuts funding for the National Park Service by more than \$1 billion. This includes a more than 25%—approximately \$760 million—reduction in operations, a 93% cut to natural recreation and preservation programs, and a 94% cut to the Historic Preservation Fund. These cuts will directly impact public access to our national parks and degrade the visitor experience. As visitation continues to



rise, more and more people will arrive at parks only to find them understaffed, mismanaged, unsafe, or even closed due to lack of resources.

As a result, Americans will be unable to fully experience the beauty these parks have to offer, and public support for them could erode. I am concerned that this may be part of a broader strategy—weakening public lands so that efforts to sell them off to private interests for drilling, logging, or mining face less resistance. That would mean less of our public land preserved for public use.

The President’s budget request also proposes cutting funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System by 20%, hampering conservation efforts, putting more species at risk, and degrading the overall quality of our environment. It further proposes eliminating all funding for renewable energy programs within the Department of the Interior, slowing our transition to a clean energy economy while global competitors, such as China, move rapidly ahead.

At the same time, we are seeing how vulnerable our reliance on fossil fuels can make us, as geopolitical conflicts increasingly center on control of global oil supplies. Meanwhile, the American people are being forced to shoulder the burden of rising gas prices, which have already increased significantly and may continue to climb.

The administration also proposes slashing funding for the U.S. Geological Survey by 37%, weakening our ability to monitor and understand the environmental impacts of these policies. The future envisioned in this budget is one with fewer national parks, diminished public lands, more endangered and extinct species, degraded air and water quality, and higher profits for fossil fuel executives—the only group that appears to benefit from these cuts.

I look forward to hearing your answers today, Mr. Secretary, and to understanding how dismantling these programs will help address the challenges facing the American people. Thank you, and I yield back.

### **Witnesses**

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

[\*Testimony\*](#)

### **Q&A**

**Full Committee Chairman Tom Cole (R-OK)** began by asking Sec. Burgum about the Department of the Interior's expanded role in administering Indian education programs transferred from the Department of Education, inquiring about staffing, resources, training, and service delivery improvements. Sec. Burgum responded that four programs are being transferred along with accompanying FTEs, noting that some Department of Education staff are being detailed to the Bureau of Indian Education to ensure continuity of knowledge and program administration. He added that the BIA's existing grant management systems made it a suitable fit for the transferred programs. Second, Chairman Cole raised concerns about recovery efforts at Chickasaw National Recreation Area in Oklahoma following a 2024 tornado and about staffing challenges at national parks. Sec. Burgum stated that roughly \$13 million across four contracts had recently been pushed out for the recreation area and described efforts to modernize aging IT systems to expedite contracting. On hiring, he explained that the department has established a local hiring authority to bypass the lengthier federal process, which he said addresses both hiring delays and housing shortages near parks. He also noted that the 5,500 summer hire positions received a waiver extending their term from six to nine months and suggested the appropriations subcommittee consider making that flexibility permanent. Chairman Cole commended the hiring reforms.



**Full Committee Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT)** expressed concerns about transferring funding from Education to BIA. She also discussed the harms DOGE had on the Department firing hundreds to thousands of employees, largely impacting the forest service and National Park Service. Ranking Member DeLauro asked if the Department has a target for how many NPS employees they can lose. Sec. Burgum highlighted that he and the Department care deeply for the National Parks, and continued that we have to ask how many people are in the NPS and how many actually work in a park. He added that when they arrived many of them were remote and couldn't figure out which national park they were affiliated with. He stated their goal is to have more people working in the parks and stated that some of their largest parks saw more people last year than they had before. Sec. Burgum said there are transfers in this budget where many people across wildlife refuges, BIA, NPS that were designated as wildland firefighters that are moving to the wildland fire service and said that may be where they are seeing some of these dramatic percentages. Ranking Member DeLauro said there have been real cuts from DOGE. Sec. Burgum said the only DOGE cuts were with people hired in the last 12 months, and they have all been offered jobs back. Ranking Member DeLauro asked again if they have a target for how many people they want to lose to buy outs and retirements before they begin terminating people. Sec. Burgum said there is no plan for RIFs, and they had just finished a round of buyouts. Ranking Member DeLauro questioned who is going to handle the new responsibilities of the Department if there's been a reduction in force. Sec. Burgum said 16 people, including the money, are coming over from the Department of Education to handle the programs being transferred over. Ranking Member DeLauro discussed the proposed consolidation of the Fish and Wildlife services, along with the National Marine Fisheries and additional cuts. She asked if cutting funding guarantees that conservation efforts are going to suffer. Sec. Burgum said he doesn't agree and that there is a separate firefighting unit inside fish and wildlife, which is being transferred to the proposed wildland group which is separate in the budget and comes with a big net increase. Ranking Member DeLauro asked what is happening to the Stewart McKinney wildlife refuge. Sec. Burgum said there was review done on the grant side, and found organizations that had 80-100% of their revenue was the grant.

**Chairman Mike Simpson (R-ID)** discussed wildfire fighting and the administration's consolidation of firefighting activities from Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Parks Service (NPS), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), BIA, the Office of Aviation Services and the Office of Wildland Fire into the new Wildland Fire Agency. He recognized that fire season was now year-round and asked Sec. Burgum to provide an update on how things were going; how the new United States Wildland Fire Service more prepared, efficient, and effective at fighting wildfires, and understanding that many wildland firefighters were not full time, how the consolidation had impacted federal land management activity in the bureaus and offices of the firefighters who were moved. Sec. Burgum clarified that it was not a consolidation, rather a unification of the four dedicated groups fighting fires who previously had no coordination, emphasizing that coordination could have prevented significant losses from previous wildfires. Sec. Burgum highlighted the recently hired fire chief and his geographic leaders and that they will be ready to go for this fire season, noting they would be operating under a suppression method for firefighting at the beginning of the season. Chairman Simpson spoke about the independent report requested by the committee the previous year from the Secretary and the Secretary of Agriculture on wildfire fighting and asked Sec. Burgum where they were on that report. Sec. Burgum explained that they were progressing but he did not yet have a specific date. Chairman Simpson said there were still questions that had to be answered and then they could deal with that but raised concerns about taking firefighting away from the Forest Service and putting it under Interior as to how the Forest Service would function. Chairman Simpson acknowledged Congress' culpability in the wildfire issue by writing different laws for the various agencies, noting that had to change. Sec. Burgum agreed and noted the need to equalize pay scales and other benefits between the agencies' firefighters.



**Ranking Member Chellie Pingree (D-ME)** recognized Sec. Burgum's efforts in the DOI but also recommended that he release more information on his consolidation attempts. She expressed her concerns over the DOI having enough resources to address the upcoming fire season, linking the increase in extreme weather this year to climate change. Ranking Member Pingree expressed her frustrations over the Trump administration's unwillingness to examine renewable energy as a valid source to meet energy demand, noting the DOI's role in achieving American energy dominance. She also criticized the administration's suspension of offshore wind projects by TotalEnergy and argued that these projects could have addressed increasing energy demand and costs in the Atlantic grid. She questioned the legality of the \$1 billion deal among the Trump administration and TotalEnergies, noting that the court had rejected the administration's national security concern argument. Ranking Member Pingree said that she did not understand why taxpayer dollars were being directed towards this deal, and asked Sec. Burgum to justify this deal. Sec. Burgum argued that offshore wind energy was not an affordable option and proved to be disruptive to the environment due to deep-sea trenching. He rejected Ranking Member Pingree's characterization of the deal, explaining that the agreement was a refund of money that TotalEnergy gave to the government to buy an offshore lease. He argued that the national security concern affiliated with offshore wind energy projects was valid, mentioning that the five potential projects were in a high-risk area and could interfere with radar detection for malicious actors overseas or be easily targeted. Sec. Burgum stated that many locals who worked in fishing were happy these projects were cancelled because they harmed fish and marine animals in their areas. Ranking Member Pingree noted that Sec. Burgum cancelled the Endangered Species Act in the Gulf of Mexico and argued that this made his arguments on harming animals hypocritical. She disagreed with his points on affordability and disruption and asserted that there was no way to justify taking away these in-progress projects. Sec. Burgum asked if that meant there was no good argument for taking away company's money and not refunding them if they could not use their resources. Ranking Member Pingree responded that the courts had already rejected this argument. Sec. Burgum argued that this was a mischaracterization, and the courts had actually said that the national security issue would not apply until the projects were theoretically completed. Ranking Member Pingree said that if offshore wind projects were that disruptive, then Sec. Burgum would not consider reforming the permitting process for offshore drilling, referring to the harms of Deepwater Horizon. Sec. Burgum explained that there was no desire to do anything but improve the permitting process and said he wanted the agencies to receive more inspections from the MMA instead of being broken up like Ranking Member Pingree believed. He asserted that the Trump administration had no interest in harming the environment or animals. Ranking Member Pingree argued that the administration was trying to pull back any regulation they could even if they did cause harm. She explained that she had examined the tapes of the Deepwater Horizon investigation and noted that one of the main concerns that came up in those documents was that there was a combined organization that conducted both permitting and inspections. She argued that this phenomenon caused corruption and recommended separating those two processes into two different agencies. Ranking Member Pingree urged Sec. Burgum to communicate more with Congress on his priorities so that she could better understand his reasoning behind certain decisions instead of assuming the worst. She also discussed how the Trump administration has been attempting roll back reforms related to decommissioning requirements, stating that this was a key fallback of Deepwater Horizon. She asked Sec. Bergum why they were rolling back these reforms if they wanted to maintain human and environmental protection. Sec. Bergum stated that this was not true and all they wanted was to ensure that team members were present during inspections of blowout preventors during this reorganization process. Ranking Member Pingree asked if Sec. Bergum could give her more information on this. Sec. Bergum said yes. Ranking Member Pingree ended by arguing that it was ludicrous to argue that offshore drilling was less dangerous for national security and the environment than offshore wind projects.



**Rep. Celeste Maloy (R-UT)** noted the president’s budget had a billion-dollar investment in the Great Salt Lake restoration and requested Sec. Burgum’s team coordinate with her, the governor, and the state to ensure a long-term plan. Sec. Burgum confirmed he would work with them. Rep. Maloy raised a concern that high-visitation parks in Utah are losing revenue because online pass sales are split evenly across all parks. Sec. Burgum acknowledged the issue and said the department would review revenue impact, and he pointed to GOA reauthorization as a piece of the solution. Rep. Maloy offered to work with department to find creative solutions. Rep. Maloy noted, as Chair of the Western Caucus, that she led a letter with Rep. Hageman and 23 colleagues supporting the new NEPA regulations. She then asked Sec. Burgum to explain how the move from the CFR to departmental handbooks will help improve the process for Americans. Sec. Burgum explained that regulatory creep had ballooned the rules far beyond what the law requires. He noted the department moved nearly 80% of the regulation, which was advisory rather than required, into an appendix. He noted this left 20% of the regulations as enforceable. Sec. Burgum continued explaining that this narrowed what can be litigated and that it speeds up permitting. He then noted that approximately \$1.5 trillion in proposed U.S. capital investment is currently stalled on waiting permits. Rep. Maloy then flagged that the minimization criteria, which originated from an EO, has resulted in road closures and lost public land access in Utah. She noted that she has introduced CRAs to address specific sites but asked whether the department could tackle the minimization criteria more broadly. Sec. Burgum agreed to review specific sites and stated the department’s goal is to increase access rather than to reduce it. He noted that over 60% of Utah is public land, making access critical there. Rep. Maloy closed by thanking Sec. Burgum for DOI’s action implementing the Congressional Review Act on Glen Canyon National Recreation Area to ensure it is managed as a recreational area.

**Rep. Josh Harder (D-CA)** noted the establishment of the National Energy Dominance Council and highlighted his shared belief with the administration that it should be easier to build more affordable energy. He questioned the administration’s actions in achieving this, though, noting the pause on wind and solar projects. He emphasized that the grid needs the cheapest electrons as fast as possible. He asked the Secretary what the holdup is on getting these projects out the door. Sec. Burgum noted there is a debate on what the cheapest energy is and discussed that during Winter Storm Fern, wind and solar produced 2% of the total electricity, though the Northeast has subsidized the development of these energy projects with taxpayer dollars. He noted the taxpayer subsidies have promoted this type of energy. Rep. Harder stated that he hears this argument but noted the higher standards for wind and solar projects than for oil and gas projects. He asked why the market shouldn’t decide and why all projects shouldn’t have the same standards. Sec. Burgum said the market is not building new offshore wind and since the elimination of the subsidies, no one is building these projects, stating that it is because they are not effective. He discussed that there are supply chain security concerns with solar projects because many projects depended on Chinese-made solar panels. Rep. Harder asked if there is a greater national security risk in doing solar than nuclear or gas. Sec. Burgum said yes, noting that dependency on China for solar panels is a concern. He noted that under the Biden administration, wind and solar projects were greenlit and expressed concern about cases where solar panels were built over rare white sage in ecosystems that require review. Rep. Harder responded that it seems like one standard for one type or energy and another for another type of energy, which he stated is not good policy. He expressed support for permitting reform and emphasized that a level playing field will be required. Sec. Burgum stated that another factor in the thinking is the grid, discussing that in areas of the country that have rotated towards sources dependent on the weather, costs increase for the person paying their electric bill. He noted that weather-dependent, intermittent energy can work when there is enough baseload. Rep. Harder responded that he hears the Secretary’s perspective, but emphasized the need for a level playing field, the market deciding, and one type of permitting. He reiterated his concern that Secretary-level approval is needed for wind and solar projects. He then discussed the letter he sent to Sec. Burgum nine months ago on the Wildland Fire Proposal and asked for a response and an idea of future collaboration. Sec. Burgum apologized and said



he would follow up. Rep. Harder emphasized his interest in collaborating. He then discussed the rising gas prices and asked Sec. Burgum what he should be telling his constituents. Sec. Burgum responded that California has a special challenge, as they import more oil from foreign countries and are one of the only states dependent on oil coming from the Strait of Hormuz. He discussed the decreasing number of refineries due to the regulatory environment and noted a large chunk, beyond taxes, is because of the supply chain. He stated that California is an energy island and discussed that there must be a policy change, calling the state a national security risk.

**Rep. Mark Amodei (R-NV)** started by noting that nobody is more dependent on federal land management policy than Nevada, asking for Sec. Burgum's number one priority for the state. Sec. Burgum said getting the birds regulations that are killing ranching under control and addressing the rural horse and burros' problem. Sec. Burgum said the higher-level priority is with mining and minerals, stating that Nevada had a rich history of mining and can again, noting that Nevada can play a huge role in minimizing the country's dependence on China for critical minerals. Sec. Burgum also said making sure there is adequate water supply for southern Nevada. Rep. Amodei asked if Sec. Burgum has any plans to address land management checkerboarding. Sec. Burgum said the DOI is happy to address it where they can by law, noting that last year the DOI completed a checkerboard elimination effort in Utah and they saw some success. Rep. Amodei asked about Nevada, to which Sec. Burgum said there are no plans that he is aware of, but the DOI is happy to work with Rep. Amodei and his staff. Rep. Amodei expressed concern for local liaisons having a seat at the unification process, asking if there is consideration for that as a "sixth leg." Sec. Burgum said there will be a leader for Nevada who will be responsible. Rep. Amodei asked how that person would be picked regionally. Rep. Amodei asked if there has been progress in supporting housing or higher paychecks so personnel can take jobs. Sec. Burgum said he is happy to follow up. Rep. Amodei also noted John Raby's stepping down from his position as Nevada State Director and applauded his work.

**Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN)** discussed boundary waters and highlighted a recent CRA which overturned a 2023 mineral withdraw for the head waters of the boundary waters. She noted that toxic sulfide and copper mining have contaminated these waters and expressed concern that the administration has weaponized the use of CRAs. She argued that CRAs were never intended to overturn land orders, especially those that are three years old, and highlighted that Congress failed to act against the 2023 withdrawal within the legal review period. Rep. McCollum asked if public land orders are still governed by FLPMA, if Congress can expect a flood of public land orders following this recent CRA, and what the process is now. Rep. McCollum said she would submit these questions for the record. Rep. McCollum then discussed the proposed 27% cut to the BIA and argued that the BIE and Tribal Loan Program are at significant risk. She then mentioned solar and asked Sec. Burgum to visit the Wind River Reservation to see the homes fueled by solar power sourced from a U.S. company. She explained that this company is helping to train tribes to maintain their solar power and noted that there has been an interest in expanding these efforts to other reservations. Rep. McCollum then asked Sec. Burgum if he could send her the national security information for the boundary waters, highlighting concerns around some of the entities that have made investments in the area. She questioned Sec. Burgum's national security concerns around wind and solar.

**Rep. Michael Cloud (R-TX)** opened by acknowledging Sec. Burgum's engagement and proactive approach, then raised two primary concerns: the national parks maintenance backlog and the existence of an unofficial resistance organization operating within the National Park Service. Sec. Burgum responded that the maintenance backlog, now estimated at \$35 billion across the Interior Department, is a decades-old problem that worsens without timely intervention, and that addressing federal procurement inefficiencies and empowering partner organizations such as the National Park Foundation could help



resolve deferred maintenance more efficiently. On the matter of internal resistance, Sec. Burgum acknowledged it as a known problem being addressed, while also noting that certain outside organizations, such as the National Parks Conservation Association, generate revenue by spreading fear about the state of the parks without directing funds toward actual conservation efforts. Rep. Cloud then raised concerns about offshore wind turbines posing national security risks due to radar interference, before pivoting to questions about energy permitting and the importance of baseload energy in the context of the AI arms race with China. Sec. Burgum emphasized that the administration has prioritized keeping baseload power online, streamlining grid interconnection permitting, and attracting private capital investment in energy infrastructure, arguing that weather-dependent energy sources alone cannot sustain the growing electricity demands of AI manufacturing and advanced industry, and that losing the AI arms race to China would pose a direct threat to national security.

Rep. Jake Ellzey (R-TX) discussed his concern with the lack of law enforcement in Indian country and highlighted that it has enabled organized crime or human trafficking to take advantage. He believes this can be solved but called for his absolute involvement in the issue. He spoke about the value our parks hold and highlighted Fort Washington as a wonderful park but needs some work. Rep. Ellzey asked him to explain what he has been doing on the MMIP issue. Sec. Burgum appreciated the photos shown of Fort Washington and drew attention to the proposed \$10 billion for deferred maintenance. He continued that he has directly worked in handling MMIP during his time as governor. He continued that last year he had 24 tribal leaders at the department and invited the FBI for the first time to continue to raise awareness, which resulted in the FBI committing to creating a task force to handle the issue. Sec. Burgum noted the challenges in solving these cases as many have gone cold or had late reporting.

**Chairman Simpson** spoke about spending on wild horses and burros in FY26 and asked the Secretary to solve that problem. He concurred with Rep. Ellzey's concern about murdered and missing indigenous people and appreciated the increase in the budget to address that, emphasizing the need to address jurisdictional issues in those cases. He mentioned getting a head start on the reauthorization for the fire funding fix treating wildfires like other natural disasters which expires next year, and asked Sec. Burgum if he or his department had any recommendations for changes or ways to improve the program in the reauthorization, they were welcome. Chairman Simpson discussed sage grass management and provisions in the bill to prevent it from being listed while state versus federal jurisdictional issues were being worked out. He talked about the Endangered Species Act proposed rule and asked Sec. Burgum to walk through the changes and how they would improve the implementation of the Endangered Species Act. Sec. Burgum explained that the reforms were common-sense- and efficiency-based to focus on protecting wildlife rather than preventing development. Chairman Simpson agreed that the law was more about controlling land and water which was the problem due to challenges around delisting species once they were listed. Sec. Burgum added that 97% of species that had gone on the list never came off, but the idea should be around saving things and taking them off because they recovered. Chairman Simpson discussed the bird hearing last week and results working with ranchers over against them with lawsuits

**Ranking Member Pingree** highlighted the prevalence of murdered indigenous women and urged the committee to address law enforcement in tribal communities. She referenced Sec. Bergum's 2023 Clean Energy Proclamation while he was the governor of South Dakota and disagreed that the administration should not be investing in clean energy. She argued that the United States was over-reliant on fossil fuels and harmed the environment. Ranking Member Pingree urged the administration to invest in their own clean energy and electric cars so that America does not rely upon China or Canada. She referenced a report from ISO claiming that offshore wind energy is helpful in the Northeast for system reliability during cold weather and discussed how her community is served by wind. She also noted that she double-checked that reforms are actually being made in the blowout preventor regulations and that she was not



lying about this claim. Sec. Burgum mentioned that the Trump administration was interested in utilizing nuclear, geothermal, and hydro energy and expressed his optimism for acquiring a reliable, environmentally friendly baseload in the future. He also argued that electric cars were not affordable and immediately environmentally friendly. Ranking Member Pingree said that she meant that electric cars were currently cheaper due to oil costs. Sec. Burgum asserted that the electric car user rates would go down once subsidies were revoked and alleged that the Trump administration's Executive Orders and investments in nuclear proved that the government was committed to utilizing alternative energies. Ranking Member Pingree and Sec. Bergum discussed the advantages and downsides of solar energy, with Ranking Member Pingree noting that she was grateful for the aforementioned subsidies. Sec. Burgum criticized the Biden administration for allegedly taking an "all of the above approach" while downplaying the reliability of fossil fuels and utilizing clean technology that was not ready to be deployed. He argued that correlating energy costs with AI demand was not a valid argument and noted that states that relied upon natural gases had the lowest energy costs in the nation. Ranking Member Pingree stated that she was focusing on efforts to lower costs for clean energy. Sec. Bergum asserted that part of his job was to deploy reliable, low-cost energy to Americans and praised governors who were open to this approach. He argued that this approach would advance economic development throughout the country.

***The hearing was adjourned.***