



FROM: Kountoupes Denham Carr & Reid

DATE: Wednesday, May 13, 2026

RE: House Natural Resources Full Committee Hearing titled “Examining the President’s FY 2027 Budget Request for the Department of the Interior”

Topline Summary

- The House Natural Resources Committee convened for a hearing to examine President Trump's Fiscal Year 2027 budget request for the Department of the Interior, with Secretary Doug Burgum testifying as the sole witness.
- Over the course of the hearing, members covered a wide range of topics including the proposed consolidation of BOEM and BSEE into the new Marine Minerals Administration; the July 15, 2025 secretarial memo requiring secretary-level approval on all solar and wind permits; and coal leasing and critical minerals development.
- Republicans praised Sec. Burgum's leadership in advancing American energy dominance and rolling back what they characterized as burdensome Biden-era regulations. They focused heavily on coal, critical minerals, baseload power reliability, hunting and angling access, wildfire suppression, public lands management under multiple use, tribal public safety in Indian Country, and the importance of permitting reform to unlock domestic resource development.
- Democrats challenged the administration on rising gasoline and electricity prices, the slow-walking of wind and solar permits in the wake of the July 15 memo, a \$1 billion no-bid contract dispute related to the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, the proposed White House ballroom and the proposed Arc de Triomphe-style arch near Arlington National Cemetery, proposed cuts to the National Park Service and tribal programs (including a billion dollars in cuts to BIA core programs), the TotalEnergies offshore wind settlement, the destruction of a culturally significant indigenous site at Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge during border wall construction, and what they described as ethics concerns within the Department.

Members Attending: Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-AR), Ranking Member Jared Huffman (D-CA), Rep. Harriet Hageman (R-WY), Rep. Susie Lee (D-NV), Rep. Tom Tiffany (R-WI), Rep. Joe Neguse (D-CO), Rep. Pete Stauber (R-MN), Rep. Jeff Hurd (R-CO), Rep. Dave Min (D-CA), Rep. Paul Gosar (R-AZ), Rep. Maxine Dexter (D-OR), Rep. Rob Wittman (R-VA), Rep. Yassamin Ansari (D-AZ), Rep. Tom McClintock (R-CA), Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-MI), Rep. Daniel Webster (R-FL), Rep. Emily Randall (D-WA), Rep. Tim Walberg (R-MI), Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL), Rep. Russ Fulcher (R-ID), Rep. Sarah Elfreth (D-MD), Rep. Addison McDowell (R-NC), Rep. Val Hoyle (D-OR), Rep. Mike Ezell (R-MS), Rep. Adelita Grijalva (D-AZ), Rep. Melanie Stansbury (D-NM), Rep. Mike Kennedy (R-UT), Rep. Seth Magaziner (D-RI), Rep. Jeff Crank (R-CO), Res. Cmmsr. Pablo José Hernández (D-PR), Rep. Troy



Downing (R-MT), Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-CO), Rep. Adam Gray (D-CA), Rep. Cliff Bentz (R-OR), Rep. Jen Kiggans (R-VA), Rep. Nick Begich (R-AK), & Rep. Celeste Maloy (R-UT)

[Live Hearing Link](#)

Meeting called to order by Chairman Westerman

Opening Statements

Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-AR): Good morning and welcome, especially to Secretary Burgum, to this important oversight hearing on President Trump's fiscal year 2027 budget request for the Department of Interior. Our abundant natural resources really are the backbone of our nation. Multiple uses of our public lands provide the food, the fuel, and fiber that benefit Americans across the country.

Oil, gas, and coal and other energy sources developed on our public lands power our cars, our homes, and our businesses. Timber resources create jobs in rural communities and provide the raw materials necessary to build homes, schools, and businesses. Water is both essential for life and a vital source of power and transportation. The scope of our committee's jurisdiction is significant and carries with it profound responsibility.

As stewards of our natural resources, it is imperative that we manage and conserve these assets, not only for our own benefit, but also for the well-being of future generations. The Department of the Interior and its agencies oversee more than 480 million acres of surface land, 750 million acres of subsurface and mineral estate, and more than 2.5 billion offshore acres. These lands and waters are expected to generate close to \$20 billion for the American taxpayer in 2027.

While awe-inspiring, proper stewardship requires strong leadership, something that's been a breath of fresh air under this administration. Building on the momentum of the working family tax cuts, committee Republicans have continued to unleash American energy and strengthen domestic mineral supply chains. To remain energy dominant, we must continue to unlock our resources and make sure that we can continue to build the critical infrastructure needed to fuel our country and our allies. In 2025 alone, the Bureau of Land Management held 22 oil and gas lease sales across 10 states that generated more than \$355 million in revenue.

These lease sales help us reduce our reliance on our foreign adversaries, create good-paying American jobs, and boost local economies. Congress and the administration must continue to work together to unleash American energy, building on our current momentum so our nation can remain secure and energy dominant. We must also work together to prevent catastrophic wildfires, restore forest health, and protect communities. With more than 44 million homes at risk in the wildland-urban interface, the need to act quickly has never been greater.

Across the West, snowpack is at its lowest level in more than four decades, an ominous sign as we enter the height of the wildfire year. That's why I'm pleased to see the administration's budget so closely aligned with our bipartisan Fix Our Forests Act, including creating a wildland fire intelligence center, tripling the size of existing categorical exclusions, and codifying emergency authorities. Secretary Burgum, I look forward to working with you to get this bill to President Trump's desk so we can give you the tools you need to address our wildfire and forest health crisis.



In the West, President Trump and Secretary Burgum have made water delivery a top priority, reducing record regulatory bottlenecks and streamlining the construction of water infrastructure. Republicans' working families' tax cuts included a significant investment in western water storage and conveyance projects. Under the Secretary's leadership, the Department has invested nearly \$890 million in water projects to ensure reliable and secure water deliveries for farmers, ranchers, and households across the West.

Again, our natural resources are the backbone of our country. We must steward our resources well and responsibly develop them for the benefit of our nation and our allies. Secretary Burgum, I do welcome you back to the committee. I look forward to your testimony and discussion of how we can work together to responsibly manage our resources. And with that, I now recognize Ranking Member Huffman for an opening statement.

Ranking Member Jared Huffman (D-CA): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome back, Mr. Secretary. Since you were last here, things have unfortunately gotten worse for the department and a lot worse for the American people. President Trump is gutting funding and personnel in the agencies that manage our public lands, ordering what's left of the beleaguered National Park Service staff to whitewash history, shutting down projects that are ready to bring cheap, reliable clean energy to millions of families who are struggling with skyrocketing utility bills, and bullying the offshore wind industry into abandoning billions in investments that would bring even more affordable energy online. He promised Big Oil that he'd give them everything they want if they funded his 2024 campaign, and he has delivered on that by driving U.S. energy policy down a one-way street of fossil fuel dependency, blocking the off-ramps with his war on clean energy, and now crashing the car with the war in Iran.

Fifteen months in, the reality of these decisions is setting in. Oil and gas prices are soaring. As America pulled back from global leadership on clean energy technology, China stepped right in to fill the void. And while your administration promotes oil, gas, and coal, the fuels of the 20th century, the rest of the world is looking to the future and rushing to buy EVs, batteries, solar panels, and wind turbines from China and others.

Trump's policies have been terrible for our competition with China, terrible for working families trying to pay their bills. There is only one group that benefits from these policies, and that is the oil and gas oligarchs who funded Trump's campaign. Mr. Secretary, at every turn you've helped all this happen. You have treated the public lands and waters that you've been entrusted with like assets on a corporate balance sheet so that billionaires, foreign companies, and political donors can profit.

You've enabled a culture of corruption where people in your agency are making decisions that line their own pockets and enrich their families and friends. Under your leadership, the Department of Interior has been a billionaire's dream, but a nightmare for the public and a betrayal of our obligations to future generations. Families across the country right now can't even afford essentials like gas, healthcare, and groceries. But instead of trying to make their lives better, the President has been obsessed with a raft of vanity projects and you've been one of the principal enablers. You've fed his hyper fixation on buildings that glorify him, like the ridiculous gilded ballroom and the massive arch to Trump that he's trying to build right in front of Arlington Cemetery. You even put his picture on park passes.

You let him replace Martin Luther King Jr. Day with his own birthday as a free National Parks Day. Under your budget, which you say in your testimony is about fiscal responsibility, just about everything that benefits tribes, public lands, wildlife, and water is facing deep cuts, which makes the increased funding for Washington, D.C. beautification and the endless time and money that you seem to have for



projects that stroke Trump's massive ego even more glaringly disconnected from the needs and reality that most American families are facing right now. This is the most corrupt administration in American history. My oath of office requires me to be very candid about that.

One tally of cash and gifts received by the Trump family from selling the presidency comes to \$2.6 billion, and that is almost certainly an understatement. Donald Trump Jr. invested in a small mining startup that has ballooned to 10 times its original value after his father bought a chunk of the company with taxpayer dollars and then issued a Department of Defense loan for \$620 million more. In fact, Trump has been on a spending spree, buying chunks of lots of companies, including foreign-owned mining companies like Trilog Metals, which is proposing a mine in the Alaska wilderness.

Meanwhile, Trump appointees are making a mockery of ethics while reaping personal benefits. At the Fish and Wildlife Service, an official got her family business a permit for its captive animal breeding operation. Your associate Deputy Secretary inked an undisclosed \$3.5 million water rights deal with a mining company. My colleagues and I have been working around the clock to keep up with this steady churn of scandal created by Trump and your Interior Department. But, Mr. Secretary, you and your agency have stonewalled us at every turn. We're asking important questions, but the lack of transparency raises bigger questions. What are you hiding, and for whose benefit?

Mr. Secretary, we expect truthful answers to our questions. The American people deserve that. They deserve to see that public office is a public trust, not an investment opportunity for billionaires and plutocrats, and not a vessel for one man's insatiable self-aggrandizement. The American people deserve better. I yield back.

Witnesses

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

Testimony

Q&A

Rep. Harriet Hageman (R-WY) thanked Sec. Burgum for the Department's finalization of its NEPA implementing regulations to make it easier to permit, access, use, hunt, recreate on, develop, and build on federal lands, noting she co-led a letter with Western Caucus Chair Maloy on the importance of permitting reform. She thanked Sec. Burgum for his support of Wyoming's coal industry, noting that Wyoming has led in coal production since 1986 and now produces approximately 40 percent of the coal used in the United States. Rep. Hageman cited a February report from the Wyoming and U.S. Energy Authorities concluding that after more than a decade without new federal coal leasing, domestic and international demand could outpace supply by 2030. She asked what the Department is doing to ensure BLM develops a fair market value for coal that reflects real market conditions while encouraging leasing. Sec. Burgum said affordable, reliable baseload energy is key to winning the AI arms race with China, noting that China added 93 gigawatts of coal last year and is on track to do the same this year. He added that the coal also contains some of the highest concentrations of critical minerals the U.S. needs, and that USGS preliminary assessments estimate coal resources on federal land are worth roughly \$8 trillion. Rep. Hageman noted that the last federal coal lease was issued in 2014 and said 2030 is essentially a drop-dead date for permitting; she said she has introduced a bill to address the bonus bid process for coal in Wyoming and elsewhere. Rep. Hageman then turned to the December BLM action extending the phase-in date for compliance with the minimum bond amount for statewide oil and gas leases, noting the



underlying rule would increase the cost of a single lease bond from \$10,000 to \$150,000, and a statewide blanket bond from \$25,000 to \$500,000, a 1,400 percent increase. She asked what the administration is doing to address the rule, which has been delayed until June 2027 but remains in place. Sec. Burgum said the purpose of the rule was to drive an industry out of business, and that the Department is following the legally required quarterly lease sales (which were not held during the first two years of the Biden administration) and is taking a look at the bonding rules to ensure resources are protected without adversely penalizing producers.

Rep. Susie Lee (D-NV) began by raising the July 15, 2025 secretarial memo requiring secretary-level approval on all solar and wind permits, which she said has stalled 93 percent of all new energy capacity in Nevada. She referenced Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo's December podcast comments describing his meeting with President Trump, in which the President said he would call Sec. Burgum and tell him solar development is allowable in Nevada. She asked whether the President had called Sec. Burgum about the issue. Sec. Burgum responded that the Department is following the law. Rep. Lee again asked whether the President had called him following the conversation with the Governor. Sec. Burgum said President Trump has been clear about the energy dominance agenda and the Department is instructed to work on anything that is affordable, reliable, and secure while following the law. He also clarified that the memo elevates review to the Secretary's office, which includes administrative staff and is not limited to him personally. Rep. Lee noted that a federal judge struck down the July 15 memo last month and asked whether the Department would abide by the court order; Sec. Burgum said the Department is appealing, calling it absurd that a single district judge could dictate the internal permitting process. Rep. Lee cited a Lazard analysis identifying wind and solar as the cheapest new generation when accounting for capital, fuel, operations, and maintenance costs, even without federal subsidies. She emphasized that Nevada has the third highest unemployment rate in the country and that solar would bring tens of thousands of good-paying jobs and several billion dollars of economic benefits, urging Sec. Burgum to rescind the July 15 memo. Sec. Burgum pushed back, saying the Nevada projects produce zero electricity when the sun goes down, that the country has over-rotated toward intermittent energy, that the Lazard analysis cherry-picks incremental cost rather than total grid cost. He added that very few solar components are made in the U.S., with most coming from China, which he said poses national security concerns analogous to Huawei equipment.

Rep. Tom Tiffany (R-WI) echoed the concern about China adding 93 gigawatts of coal in one year and discussed that federal subsidies for intermittent power sources amount to \$50,000 per acre. He expressed concern about impacts on productive farmland in states like Wisconsin. He noted that Wisconsin has gone from having the second lowest utility rates in the Midwest to the second highest, attributing it to the push toward intermittent power. Rep. Tiffany then asked about the proposed U.S. Wildland Fire Service budget, noting there is a significant increase. Sec. Burgum confirmed that due to the unification of the existing groups across BLM, BIA, National Park Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife, plus the firefighting components of the U.S. Forest Service transferred from USDA, the budget appears larger. Rep. Tiffany thanked the Secretary for presiding over the unification, saying it would address the silos that have impacted firefighting. Rep. Tiffany then discussed the Obama and Biden administration's policy of paroling Chinese nationals without requiring a visa and asked whether Sec. Burgum was working with DHS to shut down that loophole. Sec. Burgum said birth tourism is on the Department's radar, particularly in the Northern Mariana Islands, where China exploited low-cost, high-volume tourism visas, and the Department is working with those who control immigration. Rep. Tiffany asked about public-private partnerships in the National Park System. Sec. Burgum cited the upcoming opening of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum as a model. Rep. Tiffany asked what actions the Department has taken to create better reporting and transparency around the Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA), which he said extreme environmental groups have used to shut down projects and fundraise. Sec. Burgum



said the Department is working to create transparency around these organizations, which position themselves as conservation groups but spend their money on lawsuits, and that under EAJA when they sue and settle, the taxpayer is on the hook for their legal fees. He said Congress should take steps to ensure taxpayer money is not used for groups blocking American projects.

Rep. Joe Neguse (D-CO) raised a letter that he and Sen. Bennet sent to the DOI on April 29 regarding the historically low snowpack in the Rocky Mountain West, requesting pre-positioning of assets and extension of federal contracts for aerial resources. He asked for a commitment to respond to the letter. Sec. Burgum committed to do so and said the unified U.S. Wildland Firefighting Group would essentially function as a Joint Chiefs of Staff for command and control decisions. Rep. Neguse then asked about the decision made by the DOI in December 2025 removing Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Juneteenth from the free entrance day list for the National Park Service, and he asked whether Sec. Burgum agreed with the view that Juneteenth provides citizens an opportunity to recommit themselves to equality. Sec. Burgum said he agreed and clarified that no holiday designations were being changed; the decision was about which days the free-entrance program would fall on, with an aim of placing more free days in the summer months when visitation is higher. Rep. Neguse urged that the decision be reversed. Rep. Neguse then asked whether Sec. Burgum was familiar with Atlantic Industrial Coatings, the company that received a no-bid federal contract for the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool project. Sec. Burgum said he was not familiar with the company by name but was aware of the project. Rep. Neguse said the contract was a \$13 million no-bid award and pressed Sec. Burgum on the federal procurement rule that no-bid contracts are reserved for situations where any delay would cause serious injury to the government. Sec. Burgum said he was positive all required bidding rules were followed, that there was a sense of urgency given record deferred maintenance and the upcoming 250th anniversary, and that the determination of legal injury was not his to make. Rep. Neguse cited a New York Times article in which President Trump described having a contact who is unbelievable at swimming pools and a Truth Social post in which the President said he did not give out the contract, DOI did. Sec. Burgum said the gentleman referred to by Rep. Neguse is not part of the contract. Rep. Neguse pressed Sec. Burgum on who selected the company; Sec. Burgum said the National Park Service and the leaders on the National Mall went through the process and selected a contractor with the capability to complete the project on time and on budget, noting \$38 million had been spent between 2010 and 2012 without fixing the issue.

Rep. Pete Stauber (R-MN) mentioned a November 2020 final rule by the first Trump administration to delist the gray wolf under the Endangered Species Act. He noted that this rule was stuck in litigation by multiple activist groups and discussed difficulties his constituents faced while handling gray wolves in their district. He asked Sec. Burgum if the Trump administration still holds the position that the gray wolf should be delisted. Sec. Burgum confirmed yes. He noted that while it was a complex issue, DOI was developing a plan to address wolf management. Rep. Stauber inquired if defending the November 2020 delisting rule still was a priority for the Trump administration. Sec. Burgum reaffirmed yes but stated that DOI was also exploring delisting as a potential option. Rep. Stauber asked if the Department has any additional tools to delist these wolves and other species, or if Congress needs to step in to help. Sec. Burgum said the Department is doing everything within the rules but would welcome future discussions with Congress given the current patchwork of state laws. Rep. Stauber turned to northern Minnesota and the Duluth Complex, which he described as the largest untapped copper-nickel deposit in the world. He thanked Sec. Burgum for his work on advancing responsible critical mineral mining in Minnesota. He noted that there is a lack of current, accurate data on the full extent of mineral wealth in Minnesota and throughout the country. Rep. Stauber asked what USGS and the Department are doing to address this. Sec. Burgum said DOI is attempting to realign USGS to its core mission of mapping, stating that this agency is essential to the broader critical minerals effort. Rep. Stauber asked if the DOI would prioritize mapping the Duluth Complex and other geological formations in northern Minnesota; Sec. Burgum said



yes. Rep. Stauber turned to Sec. Burgum's role as Chair of the President's National Energy Dominance Council. He expressed his concerns over the Trump administration looking overseas for energy projects in comparison to prioritizing domestic projects. Sec. Burgum said yes, noting that partners like Canada and Australia would help revive the U.S. mining industry. He argued that the U.S. has effectively killed its mining industry, citing that the U.S. graduated only 300 students last year with mining or metallurgical degrees. He said that while 30 the U.S. used to lead the world in critical and rare earth minerals 30 years ago, they are now dependent on China for these resources. He asserted that the U.S. does mining cleaner, better, safer, and smarter than anyone else, and that outsourcing mining is bad for the global environment and undermines national security.

Ranking Member Jared Huffman (D-CA) asked Sec. Burgum if he would agree that most Americans are struggling right now to afford basic necessities of life because of rising costs. Sec. Burgum said the administration inherited the highest inflation in 40 years and that it has done more to lower costs than any other. Ranking Member Huffman reiterated the question and asserted that this affordability issue stemmed from the Trump administration's energy and economic policies. He also accused Sec. Burgum of spending DOI's time and resources to serve certain projects such as building a ballroom and renovating the reflecting pool. Ranking Member Huffman also pointed to the proposed Arc de Triomphe arch as an example of fiscal irresponsibility and asked who the arch is being built for. Sec. Burgum responded there has been no final agency action on this proposal. Ranking Member Huffman argued that this did not answer his initial question of who the arch is being built for. Sec. Burgum stated that this proposal was for the American people and noted that there were arches as features in 68 capitals across the globe. Ranking Member Huffman countered that President Trump said that the arch was for him on the record. He then noted that gas is up to an average of \$1.40 a gallon compared to last year. He cited a March 2026 Trump Truth Social post stating, "the United States is the largest oil producer in the world by far, so when oil prices go up, we make a lot of money." He asked who "we" refers to. Sec. Burgum said "we" could be states, the federal government, and the American people, who collect royalty rates on oil production on federal lands. Ranking Member Huffman inquired if \$1.40 more per gallon is good for American families. Sec. Burgum said he was not saying that but that he was thrilled they were paying about a dollar less than during the Biden administration and that prices would drop again as supply increases. Ranking Member Huffman argued that American families were not celebrating these prices and expressed his concerns over the Iran conflict adding to the energy crisis. He asked Sec. Burgum if he thought that everything was going well. Sec. Burgum said the fact they had displaced two-thirds of Russian gas in Western Europe, shut down Iranian and Venezuelan exports, and created record-cheap oil for adversaries, meant that they were doing well. Ranking Member Huffman reiterated if Sec. Burgum felt good of the country's trajectory. Sec. Burgum responded that President Trump has shifted the geopolitical structure of energy from the Middle East, which has determined multiple global conflicts, to the Western Hemisphere. Ranking Member Huffman asked if that meant everything was going great. Sec. Burgum said that the geopolitical shift to reliable, affordable, and secure energy production was remarkable. He asserted that this situation was not temporary, and they had a plan for making things more affordable.

Rep. Pete Stauber (R-MN) submitted to the record a letter from western state governors highlighting concerns over Californian legislation related to refinery inventory supplies.

Ranking Member Jared Huffman (D-CA) noted China's increased utilization of clean energy sources in comparison to coal. Sec. Burgum countered that China still gets 60% of their electricity from coal. Ranking Member Huffman argued that China has dominated global EV sales and asserted that the Trump administration has neutered their automobile industry.



Rep. Nick Begich (R-AK) submitted to the record a previous budget justification from the Biden administration detailing plans to renovate the reflecting pool.

Rep. Jeff Hurd (R-CO) thanked Sec. Burgum for the department's continued engagement on the Shoshone Water Rights Preservation Project in western Colorado, calling it critical for agriculture, rural communities, and western water supply, and asked for the department's continued involvement. He also acknowledged the department's work on proactive wildfire mitigation and efforts to prevent further wolf introduction in Colorado, and Sec. Burgum confirmed those efforts would continue as well. Rep. Hurd pivoted to tribal public safety, noting that as chairman of Indian and Insular Affairs he consistently hears serious concerns from tribal communities about cartel activity, narcotics trafficking, and violent crim. He thanked the Secretary for a recent order focused on protecting Native American country, opioid enforcement, and crimes against children, and asked how the Indian Violent Crime Task Force would improve coordination among tribal, federal, state, and local governments long-term. Sec. Burgum noted cartels deliberately exploit jurisdictional gaps between tribal, state, and federal authority. He cited over 6,000 unsolved missing and murdered indigenous women cases and noted the FBI has formed a dedicated task force for these cases. He also disclosed an unreported bust that week I which the task force seized nearly 40,000 fentanyl pills and over 50 pounds of narcotics on tribal land. Sec. Burgum drew on his experience as North Dakota governor, where he said cartels operating out of Mexico and working with Detroit gangs were using Amtrak routes into three tribal nations, leading to 55 arrests in a single day. He also flagged chronic underfunding of detention facilities and jails as a compounding issue. Rep. Hurd asked how Congress could best support the department's public safety efforts on the lands. Sec. Burgum said funding and awareness are both needed and expressed frustration on the unreported missing women. He recommended a connected federal approach to and pointed to memoranda of understanding between state, local, and federal agencies in North Dakota as an effective model, noting that some state highway patrols cannot pursue suspects onto tribal land due to jurisdictional disputes. Rep. Hurd asked what coordination measures are in place between the task force and state and local law enforcement. Sec. Burgum acknowledged it is a work in progress, with coordination functioning well in some areas and poorly in others, and said the department is pushing to improve consistency nationwide.

Rep. Dave Min (D-CA) noted that President Trump campaigned on cutting utility rates in half within twelve months, but that residential electricity rates are now at a ten-year high sixteen months into the administration. He stated the department has refused to approve hundreds of wind and solar permits, blocking nearly 57 gigawatts of new energy, and that Sec. Burgum required nearly 70 types of wind and solar permits to receive his personal approval, which essentially rejects them. Rep. Min noted that in April a federal district court judge ruled the department was unlawfully slow-walking renewable permit approvals and issued a preliminary injunction. Rep. Min accused Sec. Burgum of holding a vendetta against renewable energy and challenged Sec. Burgum's belief that renewables require massive taxpayers' subsidies and that projects dropped of the queue once the Working Families Tax Cut bill ended those subsidies. Rep. Min called that false, citing that the 2025 queue for renewable solar, wind, and storage was over six times larger than that for gas. Rep. Min also argued that U.S. military spending in the Middle East and funding for the war in Iran represent far larger subsidies to oil and gas than anything directed at renewables. Rep. Min then challenged Sec. Burgum's prior description of wind and solar as unreliable, arguing that advances in battery storage and long-duration storage have increasingly addressed energy variability. He asked Sec. Burgum a yes-or no, whether China also seeks energy dominance. Sec. Burgum did not give a direct answer. Rep. Min then pressed whether China's energy output, noting their 434 gigawatts last year, 80% of which was renewable, while the U.S. under Sec. Burgum only produced 53 gigawatts. He argued the department's bias against renewables is harming national security and energy independence. Rep. Min then turned to the cancellation of Total Energies' offshore wind leases, stating the administration paid the French oil company \$1 billion in March 2026 from a fund strictly reserves for



legal settlements. He asked Sec. Burgum whether it was appropriate to spend that money on a foreign oil company to stop producing energy while constituents face higher utilities. Sec. Burgum disputed Rep. Min's characterization, calling it misleading and argued Total's payment was a refund. Rep. Min called that framing sematic.

Rep. Paul Gosar (R-AZ) discussed the Hualapai water tribal deal and noted that, if the settlement isn't fully funded by 2029, the U.S. will fail to meet its statutory requirements under water settlement agreements for the first time in history. Rep. Gosar thanked DOI for providing part of this funding in the FY27 budget request and asked if these investments will be maintained. Sec. Burgum said yes. Rep. Gosar noted his efforts to reshape how water settlements are launched and funded, arguing that user fees could serve as a beneficial path forward. He asked Sec. Burgum if he agreed. Sec. Burgum said they would look at all options. Rep. Gosar then discussed the importance of clean water and regions around the Colorado River and encouraged DOI to improve existing water infrastructure like desalination plants in his district. Rep. Gosar asked Sec. Burgum what the current operational status of the Yuma Desalination Plant is and what it would take to get the facility to full capacity. Sec. Burgum said the Colorado River water basin is in shortage so water desalination and other methods to increase supply will be considered. He said the YDP is included. Rep. Gosar noted the rescission of BLM's conservation and landscape health rule, arguing that this rule locked up public lands from public use. He noted his bill, the LASSO Act, which he argued would encourage the responsible use of public lands to benefit Americans. He asked Sec. Burgum if his bill would change the mission of federal land management. Sec. Burgum argued that the original law of multiple use is the direction that the U.S. needs to go and that revoking the BLM rule will allow greater use. Rep. Gosar asked if the LASSO Act would have a positive impact, especially around increasing energy dominance. Sec. Burgum said multiple use is positive for Americans and the sustainable use of land.

Rep. Maxine Dexter (D-OR) began by asking Sec. Burgum if he has any conflicts of interest as Secretary of the Interior. Sec. Burgum said no. Rep. Dexter then discussed potential conflicts of interest involving a political appointee within the Department of Interior. She asked Sec. Burgum if this appointee would be fired if she was found to have breached ethics laws. Sec. Burgum said they would follow determinations made by ethics but argued guidelines have been adhered to thus far. Rep. Dexter then discussed the Trump administration's projects like the White House Ballroom and questioned the mounting costs of these ventures. She asked Sec. Burgum if he has objected to any of these projects. Sec. Burgum noted security concerns being addressed with the ballroom. Rep. Dexter continued to question the Trump administration's investments in these projects.

Rep. Rob Wittman (R-VA) thanked Sec. Burgum and the administration for rolling back burdensome regulations on hunters and anglers, including the secretarial order directing agencies to identify access barriers, and noted committee passage of the Protecting Access for Hunters and Anglers Act. Rep. Wittman asked Sec. Burgum about additional ways to balance stewardship with access. Sec. Burgum said access is a key focus, that public lands are meant to be accessible by the public, and that the Department issued a secretarial memo establishing a presumption of openness. He said the Department has opened hundreds of thousands of acres to hunting and fishing access, is reviewing millions of acres more, and noted that hunters and anglers (not billionaires) are the largest donors to American conservation through groups like Delta Waterfowl, Pheasants Forever, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, supporting a \$1.3 trillion outdoor recreation industry employing 3 percent of America. Rep. Wittman then asked Sec. Burgum about the energy dominance agenda, including underutilized sources like nuclear power, natural gas, and renewables, and how to address grid reliability concerns and potential brownouts in Virginia. Sec. Burgum said reliable, affordable, and secure are the three pillars and described work to revive the nuclear industry following four executive orders signed by President Trump, with over a dozen



companies competing on small modular nuclear (SMR), enabling load generation to be placed next to demand. He cited geothermal breakthroughs leveraging precision drilling from the shale revolution to enable low-cost, dispatchable 24/7 generation, and hydropower opportunities through the Bureau of Reclamation's 400 dams and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' 700 dams (1,100 federal dams total), many of which have not been repowered in 30 to 40 years. Sec. Burgum said the Department could potentially get 20 to 25 percent more power from these dams through public-private partnerships.

Rep. Yassamin Ansari (D-AZ) raised the historic drought in the Colorado River Basin and noted that the three lower basin states (Arizona, California, and Nevada) earlier this month proposed a two-year comprehensive package committing a minimum of 3.2 million acre-feet of lower division water savings. She referenced the Deputy Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation's March Senate testimony that roughly \$1 billion remains available from the Inflation Reduction Act for drought mitigation, and asked Sec. Burgum to commit to working with her and Colorado River Basin colleagues to expedite the remaining IRA funding and identify other drought mitigation resources. Sec. Burgum said the Department is all hands-on deck, having engaged all seven basin governors in person, executed a drought authorities plan through Reclamation, and that the lower basin states have been fantastic in conservation, but the seven-state agreement has not yet been reached. Rep. Ansari then asked about the Department's April announcement to release up to 1 million acre-feet from Flaming Gorge and whether the full amount would be moved. Sec. Burgum said the order he signed indicated 600,000 to 1 million acre-feet but that people should presume the high end, with hydraulic assessments every two weeks. Rep. Ansari asked whether a reduction in Flaming Gorge releases would only occur with a corresponding increase in Lake Powell to Lake Mead release volumes. Sec. Burgum answered likely yes. Rep. Ansari then raised the WaterSmart program, noting the FY 2027 budget request zeroes out six WaterSmart programs, and asked whether, given the drought, the Department should be putting more money into the program. Sec. Burgum said the budget was put together at a time when the Department thought there would be a more significant runoff, and that her observation was factual, that this is a time when the Department would likely benefit from additional resources not included in the budget.

Rep. Tom McClintock (R-CA) stated that California has the largest portion of its electricity generated by wind and solar in the country and the second highest electricity rates. He blamed Democrats in the state for the current fuel situation in California, noting that California pays the highest gasoline prices in the country, with regular gas at \$6.27 per gallon at Sacramento Airport, attributing the issue not to the war with Iran but to the war on fossil fuels in California. He said in 1980, California was the second largest oil producer, with 40 refineries, and today only seven remain, of which five have warned of imminent closures, and the state has gone from producing 15% of the nation's fuel supply to less than 1%. He asked what the administration can do to bring down California gas prices and reduce dependence on foreign oil. Sec. Burgum said the California situation has become a national security risk, with over 60% of California's oil imported and the collapsed refining sector. He added that California is essentially an energy island, and that California's lowest prices in 2025 before the Iran war were higher than virtually every other state's highest prices. He said California is the only state really dependent on fuel from the Strait of Hormuz, with some refined product traversing the world to Korea and then to Long Beach or San Francisco. Sec. Burgum cited DOE data confirming that states pursuing high renewables while shutting down baseload achieve about 50% higher electrical rates. The DOI is trying to revive California's oil production, but the state continues to sue to block production or its movement to refineries. Rep. McClintock asked what could be done, particularly on BLM land owned by the American people. Sec. Burgum said current lawsuits by California are blocking movement of oil to refineries. He noted that approximately \$1 trillion of CapEx is expected to flow into AI manufacturing, and states with high electricity rates will miss out. Rep. McClintock closed by thanking Sec. Burgum for responding to concerns regarding Yosemite, citing improvements under new Yosemite Superintendent Ray McPadden.



Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-MI) highlighted the Great Lakes as more than 20% of the world's fresh water and an economic engine for two countries, with more than 30 million Americans and Canadians relying on the Great Lakes for clean drinking water and livelihoods. She asked how the committee can work with Sec. Burgum to protect the Great Lakes amid budget cuts. Sec. Burgum said the DOI would be happy to work on anything that protects the Great Lakes. Rep. Dingell then mentioned the Great Lakes Science Center in Ann Arbor, which she said is effectively shut down under the FY 2027 budget, with 108 of 137 positions being eliminated after the Center lost approximately 20% of its staff last year. She emphasized that the Great Lakes fisheries support a \$7 billion economy and that the Great Lakes Science Center costs \$15 million annually, an ROI of nearly 500 to 1. Sec. Burgum said he would have a conversation offline, acknowledging core functions, and said the DOI is also identifying activities that are not core functions to make sure staffing is appropriate. Rep. Dingell entered a Wall Street Journal article reporting that the White House is moving to reduce protections for gray and Mexican wolves as an economic handout to the cattle industry, then yielded her remaining time to Ranking Member Huffman.

Ranking Member Jared Huffman (D-CA) asked whether Sec. Burgum directed anyone at the National Park Service or DOI to form the Freedom 250 LLC. Sec. Burgum said he was not aware of the final decision-maker on Freedom 250. Ranking Member Huffman asked Sec. Burgum to provide that information to the committee. Sec. Burgum committed to do so.

Rep. Daniel Webster (R-FL) raised DOI's November map for potential gas and oil leases for 2029 and 2030 in the eastern Gulf of America, asking Sec. Burgum how the Department balances those interests with Floridians and with American energy dominance. Sec. Burgum said that they are in the middle of a long-range planning process and welcomed specific input as the process moves forward. Rep. Webster then turned to the proposed transfer of NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Office responsibilities (including protected resources under the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act) to U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and asked Sec. Burgum to share the goal of reducing red tape. Sec. Burgum said today there are effectively two endangered species lists, with one under NOAA's Marine Fisheries and one under U.S. Fish and Wildlife, creating conflict without doing anything to protect wildlife. Companies on the same water course face two different agencies and two different sets of procedures. He said the unification (not a cut) brings NOAA scientists and staff into U.S. Fish and Wildlife so there is a single process for managing aquatic species and marine mammals. Rep. Webster asked whether the change would reduce redundancies and streamline efficiencies. Sec. Burgum confirmed yes, noting it is a long overdue simplification. Rep. Webster then asked what permitting reforms are needed for pipelines, gathering systems, export facilities, transmission, and oil and gas production infrastructure. Sec. Burgum said permitting has become incredibly burdensome and there is an estimated \$1.5 trillion of capital that companies have committed to spend but are waiting on permits; he urged Congress to pass a permitting reform bill to allow the infrastructure buildout that lowers costs for Americans.

Rep. Emily Randall (D-WA) noted she represents Washington's 6th District, which includes Olympic National Park, which welcomed over 3.7 million visitors in 2024, contributing \$380 million to the local economy and supporting almost 3,000 jobs. She said the administration cut 4,000 National Park workers last year and that the FY 2027 budget request would eliminate another 3,000 jobs (a 25 percent cut to NPS). Rep. Randall said Olympic National Park is down to one permanent staffer on its fisheries team and noted that 12 federally recognized tribal nations reside on ancestral lands in her district. She asked whether Sec. Burgum's stated focus on redirecting resources from D.C. headquarters and regional offices to the field is a correct characterization, noting that the budget asks for \$10 billion for a new presidential capital stewardship program for priority construction and beautification projects in and around Washington, D.C., while asking for less than \$3 billion for repairs and maintenance in parks elsewhere.



She presented a photo of a hazardous bridge on the North Fork of the Quinault Trail in Olympic National Park (with a \$300 million deferred maintenance backlog), and an AI-generated image President Trump posted depicting the Reflecting Pool beautification project, and asked Sec. Burgum which should be the higher priority. Sec. Burgum said both, and urged passage of the Great American Outdoors Act. Rep. Randall said her constituents and most Americans believe park safety is more urgent. Sec. Burgum was then given an opportunity to address what he called the “false 25 percent NPS reduction”, explaining that the apparent reduction reflects firefighters being moved into the unified Wildland Fire Service and approximately 2,000 communications, HR, and IT staff being centralized into the Secretarial Office, all of whom remain in their roles.

Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-AR) flagged two priorities, the Fix Our Forests Act and permitting reform, noting both had passed out of committee and the full House, and asked Sec. Burgum to speak to the importance of each. Sec. Burgum thanked Westerman for his leadership on forest legislation, noting his background as a forester brings practical credibility to the effort. He argued that catastrophic wildfires are driven by fuel load buildup, and that the Fix Our Forests Act would give on-the-ground firefighters more effective and safer tools to do their jobs. He pointed out that BLM spent nine times more on firefighting last year than it took in from timber lease sales and argued that bringing the private sector back into timber harvesting would help reverse that imbalance while reviving rural communities. He noted the U.S. now imports roughly the same amount of timber it used to harvest domestically. Sec. Burgum also criticized the designation of wilderness areas, arguing that restricting fuel management in those areas effectively sets them up for fires decades later. On permitting reform, he called it one of the most impactful things Congress could do, arguing that streamlining the process would unlock private capital investment and allow the country to build infrastructure cleanly, safely, and affordably. Sec. Burgum then defended National Mall reflecting pool renovation. He noted facility issues with the pool and defended the choice of American flag blue, noting it made the reflecting pool more reflective. He pushed back on characterizations of the renovation as a vanity project, arguing the White House ballroom cannot even be fully utilized by the current president, and that its purpose is for future presidents. Chair Westerman note he had personally been beneath the reflecting pool and seen stalactites formed from years of leakage.

Rep. Luz Rivas (D-CA) noted a Santa Barbra News Press article about fire on Platform Habitat, which resulted in the safe evacuation of 26 crew members with two people sustaining minor injuries. Rep. Rivas bolstered the importance of BSEE conducting a thorough investigation and expressed concern that the proposed merger of BSEE and BOEM into the new Marine Minerals Administration would weaken the government’s ability to respond to crises like the Platform Habitat fire. She noted the proposed unification would cut budgets by \$95 million and cut 224 employees, at the same time the administration is increasing offshore oil drilling with six offshore lease sales off the California coast between 2027 and 2030. Rep. Rivas asked Sec. Burgum to assure the American people that merging the two bureaus while cutting staff and resources will not increase the risk of another catastrophic offshore oil disaster. Sec. Burgum said the key is unifying, not merging, noting the two agencies already work in collaboration, and that the intention is to eliminate redundant overhead and to fill roles that matter, like more inspectors. Rep. Rivas pressed back, pointing to the contradiction of saying there will be more inspectors while cutting staff. Sec. Burgum called it a false assertion, reiterating the goal is more people doing important work with less overhead in HR, communications, and management. Rep Rivas said se has significant concerns with the proposal and expressed her view that it will result in more risk for California’s coasts. Rep. Rivas proceeded with several entries into the record. The first being a 2008 OIG report on a pervasive culture of exclusivity and substance abuse in the Royalty in Kind program; the official Deepwater Horizon report to the President, which recommended the creation of an independent offshore



oil and gas safety agency (which became BSEE); and a Federal Register page on expected rollbacks of the well control and blowout prevention rule.

Rep. Tim Walberg (R-MI) noted the need to combat invasive aquatic species, especially in the Great Lakes. He highlighted the Trump administration's establishment of the Make America Beautiful Again Commission and asked Sec. Burgum to discuss the importance of protecting American waters from these species. He also asked how the U.S. can continue to balance stewardship and economic opportunity. Sec. Burgum argued that a big chunk of economic output from the U.S. outdoor recreation industry comes from waterways like rivers and lakes, noting that this economic success works in conjunction with the need to ensure conservation. Rep. Walberg then discussed DOI's work to ensure hunting and fishing access. He asked Sec. Burgum how steps taken to expand access to fishing and hunting can be applied to expand access to motorized recreational use on public lands. Sec. Burgum said expanding trail system availability is a key economic driver. Rep. Walberg then noted the importance of reauthorizing the Great American Outdoors Act and asked Sec. Burgum why these investments are so important. Sec. Burgum said there is a tremendous backlog in the legacy restoration fund and argued that Congress can help support these restorations by reauthorizing this act.

Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL) noted his concerns with funding cuts to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' operations and maintenance budget. He argued that this funding is critical to the restoration of the Kissimmee Channel Lakes system and asked Sec. Burgum if DOI would be ready to initiate these water projects if the funding were provided by Congress. Sec. Burgum said yes and highlighted the strong collaboration between this agency and the Department. Rep. Soto then noted the proposed 20% cut to U.S. Fish and Wildlife and asked again whether DOI would be ready to work with U.S. Fish and Wildlife to help protect key species in waterways like the Kissimmee River if additional funding is provided. Sec. Burgum said yes and noted that some of the funds taken from U.S. Fish and Wildlife will be used elsewhere for similar purposes. Rep. Soto then discussed NOAA's management of aquatic habitat and wildlife, noting that these responsibilities have been shifted to U.S. Fish and Wildlife in the proposed budget. Rep. Soto asked what the rationale behind this decision was. Sec. Burgum said the goal is to have one endangered species list and one set of regulations under ESA law. He argued that the current structure unnecessarily complicates environmental protection and project permitting. Rep. Soto then asked if NOAA experts would transfer to U.S. Fish and Wildlife under the proposed change. Sec. Burgum said there would be around 180 people who would move under the agency's jurisdiction from NOAA.

Rep. Russ Fulcher (R-ID) thanked Sec. Burgum for the Department's leadership and noted Idaho's concern about a wildfire year with low snowpack and low moisture in the Pacific Northwest. He asked about the unified firefighting structure and whether Idaho's State Department of Lands would be adequately involved in coordination. Sec. Burgum said coordination with local and state firefighting is key and that the unification means frontline wildland firefighters will report directly through a chain of firefighters up to the new National Wildland Fire Chief who reports to him, eliminating situations where land managers with different priorities interrupt the chain (e.g., a state trying to put out a fire while a federal land manager chooses to let it burn). He noted the Department issued a secretarial order putting the Department under full suppression for this fire year due to dry conditions, and shared an anecdote from his time as Governor where it took until Tuesday for FEMA-coordinated aircraft in Bozeman, Montana to deploy after a Saturday call for help, by which time two ranchers had perished and 128,000 acres had burned. Rep. Fulcher then asked about delisting Idaho's grizzly bears, noting the population went from about 800 bears in North America in 1975 to roughly 60,000 in 2026. Sec. Burgum said the Department is pursuing both delisting and engaging with the state management acts, acknowledging both a successful recovery and a new wildlife-human management challenge.



Rep. Sarah Elfreth (D-MD) began by stating that she represents 45,000 federal employees, many at Interior, and that about 20 percent of Interior's workforce has left since January 2025, with approximately 4,000 fewer National Park Service staff than in 2024 entering peak park season. She raised the America the Beautiful Park Passes, issued starting January 1 with President Trump's image. Rep. Elfreth noted the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004 requires an annual image competition; that competition was held, but the winners were not featured. She then raised a department policy invalidating park passes with stickers covering the President's face. Sec. Burgum said the policy on defacing or modifying park passes existed before this year's pass selection and is not new, dating back to prior years' passes, and is for the benefit of park employees who must verify validity. Rep. Elfreth urged the policy be reconsidered. She then turned to grants, noting an internal policy requiring Secretary-level approval for any grant over \$50,000, which based on FY 2025 numbers would mean 82 percent (19,000) of 23,000 grants, and that personally reviewing each would require approving one every 10 minutes through the end of the calendar year. Sec. Burgum responded that there is confusion: when an order says the Secretarial Office, it goes to many staff in that office, not personally to him. Rep. Elfreth asked whether the process is as efficient as in prior administrations. Sec. Burgum said when the administration came in, there were over 36,000 grants and contracts, with a record number rushed out the door between November 2024 and January 20, 2025, many a poor use of taxpayer dollars, and the new review policy has saved billions of dollars. Rep. Elfreth said she did not get a clear answer on current efficiency and yielded back.

Rep. Addison McDowell (R-NC) asked Sec. Burgum about the work the Department is doing with hunting advocates like the National Wild Turkey Federation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and Delta Waterfowl. Sec. Burgum discussed the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and emphasized that private-funded conservation projects can often be completed in half the time and at half the cost of comparable federal projects. Rep. McDowell asked how important sportsmen-generated license revenues are to conservation. Sec. Burgum said it is essential, discussing both the federal duck stamp and state licenses. Rep. McDowell then asked about the impact of prolonged permitting timelines on energy prices and domestic manufacturing competitiveness. Sec. Burgum said they raise the price of everything and often accomplish nothing. Rep. McDowell asked why permitting reform is important to critical mineral projects. Sec. Burgum explained that critical minerals are everywhere in everyday life, with 60 minerals identified by USGS as critical, and that not controlling them is a national security risk that raises prices. Rep. McDowell then yielded the remainder of his time to allow Sec. Burgum to respond to earlier questions for which he did not have time. Sec. Burgum discussed the unification of BOEM and BSEE, noting it would increase inspectors and inspections rather than reduce safety, and clarified that revenue collection is done by the Office of Natural Resource Revenue (ONRR), which remains separate, so concerns about combining royalty collection with regulation do not apply. He defended the offshore oil and gas industry as the number one contributor to coastal restoration in America, noting employees live in those coastal communities.

Rep. Val Hoyle (D-OR) noted she represents nearly a million acres of BLM forest land in southwest Oregon, that western Oregon snowpack is at an unprecedented low around 5%, and that she has concerns about FEMA's politicized disaster response. She asked whether DOI is on track to be fully staffed at 5,700 firefighters for the year. Sec. Burgum said yes for permanent firefighters, with more seasonal hires going into that number, and that hiring is going well this year. Rep. Hoyle noted that the 5,700 figure is based on the National Fire Management Analysis System last analyzed in the 1990s and asked what the plan is to address the discrepancy with current fire danger. Sec. Burgum said staffing is one component, but that this year, due to extreme conditions, the DOI is under full suppression from the start, since putting fires out quickly reduces the need for surge resources. Rep. Hoyle then asked about the roughly 11% of DOI workforce that departed and the loss of nearly 200 BLM staff and another 200 from other DOI agencies in Oregon last year, who often filled gaps on incident management teams. Sec. Burgum



said he would need to look state-by-state and reiterated the centralization point. Rep. Hoyle then asked about BLM's plan to revise the Western Oregon Resource Management Plan, which covers 2 million acres of O&C lands, seeking historically higher levels of timber production, and asked about the annual harvest volume and whether old growth would be eligible for commercial timber harvest. Sec. Burgum said he could not be specific on board feet without staff but committed to meeting with her team. On old growth, he said as a policy the DOI has been trying to avoid old growth but must figure out how to manage fuel load, since some wilderness areas became old-growth death sentences due to unmanaged fuel loads.

Rep. Mike Ezell (R-MS) turned to aquatic invasive species and efforts to manage Asian Carps throughout the Mississippi River Basin. He asked for an update on FY2025 and FY2026 aquatic invasive species funding, including carp management and state aquatic nuisance species plan funding. Sec. Burgum said he would have to circle back with details from his team. Rep. Ezell asked what challenges DOI had faced while working on this issue. Sec. Burgum discussed how consolidating NOAA and the US Fish Wildlife Service could help address both endangered and invasive aquatic species. Rep. Ezell then raised the negative impact of Double-Crested Cormorants on Gulf Coast fisheries and aquaculture. He mentioned the recent of the Cormorant bill to help states tackle this issue, and asked Sec. Burgum to discuss how he was coordinating with Gulf states and stakeholders to assist them. Sec. Burgum praised the leadership of Brian Nesvik, the current head of U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and expressed his willingness to engage with whatever stakeholders the Representative would recommend. Rep. Ezell emphasized the importance of working directly with states and regional partners. He asked how DOI is coordinating with organizations such as the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission so states can play a larger role in fishery data collection and resource discussions. Sec. Burgum said he did foresee states playing a larger role in this issue and discussed his own experience as Governor of North Dakota with the only joint federal-state fish hatchery in the country.

Rep. Melanie Stansbury (D-NM) noted that it would take Congressional action for NOAA and the US Fish and Wildlife Service programs to consolidate and stated that this proposal was not included in previous items she had seen thus far.

Rep. Adelita Grijalva (D-AZ) began by reading Sec. Burgum's 2019 statement (as Governor) at the 23rd Tribal Leaders Summit about how federal government-to-tribal government partnership requires time, intentionality, and a commitment to collaboration. She mentioned that her district includes 62 miles within the Tohono O'odham Nation. She discussed reports showing that construction related to the administration's second border wall project damaged the Las Playas Intaglio, an archaeological site culturally significant to the Tohono O'odham Nation. She asked whether the Department had conducted consultation with the Nation before this construction. Sec. Burgum said he had met with the head of Customs and Border Patrol and with Homeland Security Chief Mark Wayne Mullin, and that both had apologized to the tribe. Rep. Grijalva argued that while apologies were important, this damage could not be undone. Sec. Burgum reported that the contractor was supposed to start at the other end, a series of mistakes occurred, and there was no intention of damaging the site. Rep. Grijalva noted approximately 60 percent of the site was destroyed. She asked Sec. Burgum to commit that U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the National Park Service would avoid Quitobaquito Springs during border wall construction and minimize impacts by not using groundwater within five miles. Sec. Burgum declined to commit to specific terms without fully understanding the complexities but said that they were paying close attention to these issues and would closely consult with the tribe. Rep. Grijalva expressed her concerns over the DOI budget eliminating dedicated funding for tribal colleges and universities. She shared the story of Thurman Lynch, a Diné student at Tohono O'odham Community College pursuing a biology degree to become a veterinarian. She asked if the DOI had conducted an analysis of economic harm to rural and tribal



communities before proposing the cuts. Sec. Burgum said no. He explained that DOI funds two tribal colleges directly and gives grants to others. He cited Arizona State University's strong tribal student enrollment without federal subsidy as a model. He said that some of the schools that were previously funded were not offering a high-quality education. Rep. Grijalva countered this by arguing that BIA-funded K-12 schools achieve over 90 percent graduation rates. Sec. Burgum agreed that K-12 schools have successful models but stated that the higher education models needed reexamination while considering funding. Rep. Grijalva submitted to the record documents detailing the potential impact DOI funding levels would have on two tribal schools.

Rep. Pete Stauber (R-MN) requested to enter into the record a research paper from the American Institute of Biological Sciences reporting that gray wolf populations have grown from roughly 750 individuals in Northern Minnesota, Iowa, and Michigan fifty years ago to over 6,000 across 11 states in the Lower 48, not counting Alaska's large population. He stated he was submitting the record to correct something a colleague from Michigan had said.

Rep. Melanie Stansbury (D-NM) requested to enter the Department of Interior's budget brief into the record, which she said showed K-12 tribal education cut by over \$1 billion and secondary tribal education cut by \$105 million, pushing back on any suggestion the department supports tribal education.

Rep. Cliff Bentz (R-OR) requested to enter an official breakdown of the White House's security funding request for the East Wing Modernization Project into the record, countering claims from the other side of the aisle that the funds would not go toward security. He stated the document shows the money is designated for bulletproof glass, drone detection, chemical threat filtration, visitor screening systems, and Secret Service training.

Rep. Mike Kennedy (R-UT) noted that 67% of Utah is federal land, making his constituents particularly attentive to public land management decisions. He expressed appreciation for the department's shift toward a multiple-use approach including energy development, recreation access, grazing support, and a rollback of Biden-era restrictions, calling it a welcome change from what he described as years of Utahns being locked out of decision affecting lands they know best. Rep. Kennedy then asked whether travel management plans are still serving their intended purpose, or whether they have become bureaucratic obstacles. Sec. Burgum acknowledged challenges with the plans and said reform is warranted, stressing the need to balance people, wildlife, and economic development, and expressing openness to working with Rep. Kennedy on specific reforms. Rep. Kennedy asked whether the department is evaluating alternatives that would give more flexibility to countries, recreation users, grazing interests, and energy developers while still protecting natural resources. Sec. Burgum confirmed, adding that overlay plans created outside original enacting law sometimes end up blocking all uses of multi-use land, and that innovation can help find better solutions. Rep. Kennedy then asked for an update on the President's proposed \$1 billion appropriation for the Great Salt Lake and surrounding water infrastructure. Sec. Burgum said he was glad to be asked about something actually in his budget, noting that the White House ballroom is not in the budget, but the Great Salt Lake funding is. He stated the lake faces unique long-term challenges that have been chronically underfunded. He said the funding would be deployed over time in collaboration with state and local partners and expressed enthusiasm that the White House prioritized it given the lake's cultural importance. Rep. Kennedy noted the lake's significance to lake-effect snow, Utah's ski industry, and shared water concerns with Montana, and said he looks forward to working with the department on how the funds are deployed.

Rep. Seth Magaziner (D-RI) noted that gasoline is over \$4.50 a gallon and asked Sec. Burgum to compare his record on wind energy as North Dakota Governor to President Trump's stance against wind



energy. Rep. Magaziner played video clips of Sec. Burgum praising wind energy as Governor followed by President Trump saying wind energy will not be allowed to be built in the United States. Rep. Magaziner asked who is right about wind energy. Sec. Burgum said wind is not the lowest source of energy. Rep. Magaziner asked whether Sec. Burgum was wrong as Governor to expand wind energy. Sec. Burgum said the 40% figure is rated capacity, not actual production, and noted that North Dakota expanded baseload alongside wind. Sec. Burgum also argued that wind energy is not as reliable. Rep. Magaziner questioned this claim, citing battery capabilities and production, and reiterated his concerns around DOI's approach to wind projects. Rep. Magaziner then challenged President Trump's claims that wind energy noise causes cancer, that China has very few wind farms, and that wind and solar are the most expensive energy ever. Rep. Magaziner then closed by urging permitting reform and noted that Chairman Westerman has been working with both sides of the aisle on this issue. Sec. Burgum asked Rep. Magaziner to explain why states pursuing the policies he describes have the highest power prices in the country. Rep. Magaziner cited North Dakota and Iowa as having low prices and high renewables.

Rep. Jeff Crank (R-CO) highlighted high gas prices in 2022. He noted that U.S. oil production was 12.3 million barrels per day in 2019, 11.91 in 2022, 11.26 in 2021, and 13.3 today. He asked Sec. Burgum for his thoughts. Sec. Burgum said the energy transition was always a lie, calling it energy subtraction. He argued that the U.S. needs available power 24/7 and that intermittent weather-dependent sources cannot replace baseload without massive transmission investment. He noted that, during Winter Storm Fern this year, wind and solar produced 2% of energy in 22 states while wood and trash produced 3%. He added that, during the same time, coal flexed up 50%, natural gas flexed up 50%, and nuclear remained at 11%. He said Germany spent \$500 billion on green energy and has 20% less electricity at three times the cost, with no one building AI data centers there. Rep. Crank then asked about the Department's mapping efforts. Sec. Burgum said the new mantra at USGS is "map, baby, map" and cited a recent USGS map showing that northern Appalachia contains 300 years' worth of lithium. He added that with all batteries combined, the U.S. has about 12 minutes of grid-based battery power and that doubling battery capacity annually from a small base still means it would take a century to reach meaningful grid-scale storage. Sec. Burgum also noted that pro-China organizations are posting online comments in support of speakers who advocate for renewables.

Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-AR) submitted a report into the record suggesting that batteries are ill-equipped and limited as a holistic grid solution.

Rep. Melanie Stansbury (D-NM) entered a report into the record linking gas prices to wars abroad.

Ranking Member Jared Huffman (D-CO) entered a report into the record on the "Energy Storage Market Outlook" which states that the U.S. is expected to have over 600 gigawatt hours of total capacity by 2030, the equivalent of 300 Hoover Dams.

Res. Cmsr. Pablo José Hernández (D-PR) noted that the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2024 codified the Interagency Group on Freely Associated States, co-chaired by Interior and the State Department. He noted that residents of the Freely Associated States (FAS) serve in the U.S. Armed Forces at disproportionately high rates, yet veterans there must travel thousands of miles at personal expense to access earned VA benefits. He asked whether Sec. Burgum would commit to engaging with the VA on resolving barriers to telehealth, mail order pharmacy, and beneficiary travel benefits in the FAS. Sec. Burgum said he had already spoken to Secretary Collins about this and is working on it, but ultimately it would come out of the VA budget. Res. Cmsr. Hernández then raised the February 9 incident in which a 265-foot fuel barge ran aground at the entrance to San Juan Harbor and struck the structure of El Morro, sitting on the rocks for over two weeks. He asked whether NPS assessed the structural and



environmental damage and when the assessment would be shared with Congress. Sec. Burgum said he would share publicly when the report is completed but did not have a timeline. Res. Cmsr. Hernández asked whether the report was in progress. Sec. Burgum said he was certain it was but did not know when it would be finished or have a cost estimate. Res. Cmsr. Hernández asked what formal role NPS plays in protecting El Morro from maritime safety risks and whether Sec. Burgum would commit to working with the Coast Guard to strengthen that role. Sec. Burgum said yes.

Rep. Troy Downing (R-MT) thanked Sec. Burgum for championing American energy dominance and supporting coal mining, which has secured jobs in rural Montana communities. He asked Sec. Burgum to elaborate on why coal remains a critical component of baseload electricity, particularly given demand growth from AI data centers and domestic manufacturing. Sec. Burgum said coal is critical and reliable 24/7, not subject to supply chain disruption because most generation is near the mine and contains some of the highest concentrations of critical minerals in the country, presenting an opportunity for co-processing thermal generation and critical minerals. He said that through Sec. Wright's exercise of 202(c) authority and utilities recognizing the precarious overreliance on intermittent sources, 17 gigawatts of baseload coal remained online and was critical to getting through this past winter's peak days. Rep. Downing then asked how prior administration restrictions on federal coal leasing affected long-term planning. Sec. Burgum described a full-on assault during the Obama and Biden administrations, with rules designed to shut down coal. He said any coal plant operating in America today is clean because it survived 20 years of attack. Rep. Downing then highlighted the Trump administration's reversal of the Biden coal leasing ban in the Powder River Basin via a CRA resolution and emergency permitting that has sustained operations such as the Bull Mountains mine in Musselshell County, asking how important it is for Congress to codify these efforts. Sec. Burgum said it is incredibly important to move the energy discussion away from ideology and into durable laws. Rep. Downing then turned to tribal trust responsibilities and the eight tribes in Montana's 2nd Congressional District. Sec. Burgum said the key is driving sovereignty by creating environments for tribes to be self-sustaining, reviewing ineffective overhead-laden programs to ensure dollars reach tribes. He said Congress's main focus should be ensuring appropriate funding and staffing for BIA law enforcement, given that cartels and organized crime are exploiting tribal lands as safe havens.

Rep. Adelita Grijalva (D-AZ) entered a letter into the record from tribal leaders stating that he Trump administration failed to consult with tribal nations on significant redistricting of tribal education. She also highlighted concerns that the BIE does not have the necessary capacity to support the transfer without Education Department staff.

Rep. Melanie Stansbury (D-NM) noted her and Sec. Burgum's shared backgrounds. She noted Sec. Burgum's prior commitments to tribal trust and treaty responsibilities and consultation. She cited how those commitments appear to be in conflict with the budget's \$83 million cut to self-governance compacts, over \$1 billion in cuts to core tribal programs, over \$744 million in cuts to BIA alone, \$150 million cuts to tribal colleges, and an 85% reduction in school construction in tribal communities, alongside cuts to HUD eviscerating tribal housing programs, law enforcement, sanitation and water projects, irrigation projects, basic infrastructure, roads, economic development, and zeroing out basic education and cultural programs. She called these the largest single cuts in tribal funding since before the Reagan era. Rep. Stansbury said DOI is not doing well by tribes: tribes are not getting phone calls back from BIA, they cannot get appointments with Sec. Burgum, regional offices are not approving contracts; tribes are unable to process basic paperwork to protect tribal lands, put land into trust, or manage drought operations during the worst drought in recorded history. She also raised the DOI's lack of tribal consultation regarding Chaco Canyon. She contrasted the cuts with \$1 billion for the White House ballroom, \$15 million for an arch, and a \$10 billion D.C. beautification fund, while harming tribes



through his budget, and she urged Sec. Burgum to do right by tribes. Sec. Burgum did not have time to respond but on the record stated that there were many misrepresentations made during the prior statement.

Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-AR) entered into the record a report from U.S. Energy Information Administration on battery storage capacity.

Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-CO) referenced Sec. Burgum's December 2025 warning to Colorado that if the state did not get control of its wolves immediately, the DOI would terminate the memorandum of agreement and reclaim management authority. She cited the state's January 2025 release of 15 Canadian gray wolves without notification to citizens or local governments, and the re-release of wolf 2403, a known depredator from the Copper Creek pack that has cost ranchers over \$450,000 in compensation, and she asked what specific actions the DOI has taken since their January 18 warning. Sec. Burgum said the DOI has been in direct discussions with the Governor's office, Colorado's head of Fish and Wildlife, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife head Brian Nesvik, noting Colorado is in a predicament due to a narrowly passed ballot measure carried by Denver-area votes while ranch country deals with the outcomes. Rep. Boebert asked whether Colorado provided complete reporting on wolf activities since December 2023 as demanded in the FWS letter, and whether the DOI would terminate the Biden-era MOA and 10(j) experimental population agreement and reclaim federal management if they had not provided sufficient reporting. Sec. Burgum said all options are on the table in order to get the wolf situation under control. Rep. Boebert asked how the DOI is addressing CPW's pattern of re-releasing or translocating problem wolves and sidelining local counties and ranchers. Sec. Burgum said releasing wolves known to have prior predatory action is not a good idea and would not happen if U.S. Fish and Wildlife is involved. Rep. Boebert noted her Pet and Livestock Protection Act passed the House and asked for support to pass the Senate to help the DOI. She then mentioned her Rural Jobs and Hydropower Expansion Act, which would amend the Reclamation Project Act of 1939 to give the Bureau of Reclamation exclusive authority on non-federal hydropower development within reclamation projects, asking Sec. Burgum how the legislation could help reduce delays and unlock more clean and reliable hydropower energy. Sec. Burgum said hydropower is key and there is a big opportunity to repower the Bureau's over 400 dams.

Rep. Adam Gray (D-CA) noted he represents the largest agricultural valley in the world (San Joaquin Valley, and that the Central Valley Project (CVP) remains one of the most important water infrastructure systems in the country. He recalled his prior reconciliation amendment to spend \$8 billion on 20-plus California water projects that would have added 2 million acre-feet of water, which was rejected, while the final bill included about \$1 billion for Western water infrastructure with roughly \$540 million allocated to California. Rep. Gray then raised concerns about staffing shortages at the Bureau of Reclamation. He said that the number of staff there has dropped by more than 40 percent since last year, with at least five water projects in his district stalled due to insufficient staff to process approvals, undermining bipartisan permitting reform efforts like the SPEED Act (of which he is a co-sponsor) and his Valley Water Solutions Act. He also raised hydropower relicensing efforts before FERC in his district. He asked Sec. Burgum what specific steps the Department will take to translate approved investments into water reliability and infrastructure improvements for Central Valley producers, and whether Sec. Burgum would commit to ensuring relicensing processes move forward efficiently and fairly. Sec. Burgum said the next step is to go project by project with the Representative's office to identify whether permitting or staffing is the holdup, and that the Department is interested in solving all the issues described.

Rep. Cliff Bentz (R-OR) began by describing Oregon's challenges under 40 years of Democratic gubernatorial leadership and 20 years of legislative Democratic control. He cited rankings of 47th of 50 for business attractiveness, 49th for 4th-grade math and reading proficiency, 43rd for economic outlook,



5th for Medicaid dependence, 42nd for housing affordability, and 13th highest for closing businesses. He then talked about the Oregon and California Lands (O&C lands), 2 million acres of land in southern Oregon under a 1937 law set up to provide timber to local communities on a sustainable basis. He thanked Sec. Burgum for considering increased timber removal. Sec. Burgum said timber development by the private sector and saving forests from catastrophic fires go hand in hand by reducing fire load, and that the federal government cannot match the private sector's ability to remove timber while protecting watersheds and rebuilding rural economies. Rep. Bentz then raised the topic of mining, noting the President's negotiations with China are constrained by the United States' lack of rare earth mineral access and processing capabilities. Sec. Burgum said the Department is working closely with the National Security Council and National Energy Dominance Council to identify potential areas for critical mineral development, mining, and processing. Rep. Bentz concluded by thanking Sec. Burgum for work on the Klamath Lake basin balancing water resource applications.

Rep. Jen Kiggans (R-VA) noted her district sits between energy development, environmental stewardship, and national security. She added it's also home to Naval Air Station Oceana and one of the highest densities of military installations in the country. She flagged the proposed consolidation of BOEM and BSEE into the Marine Minerals Administration and stressed that projects already through years of federal review should be able to move forward with certainty. She asked how Interior coordinates with the Department of Defense to balance energy development with military priorities. Sec. Burgum said the coordination centers on a classified DoD assessment finding that large-scale offshore wind interferes with radar and underwater sonar. He argued that the nature of modern warfare has changed significantly since many of those projects were originally permitted, making offshore wind farms near defense installations a genuine kinetic security risk. He emphasized the review request came from the DoD, not the Interior. Rep. Kiggans pushed back, noting that Naval Air Station Oceana currently has no grid security and that a specific offshore wind project would have delivered a \$500 million grid upgrade from Dominion Energy, something the budget cannot fund. She urged Burgum to weigh the full picture, including public-private partnership benefits, when evaluating offshore projects. She then asked how the BOEM-BSE consolidation would improve permitting timelines and DoD coordination. Sec. Burgum said the consolidation reduces administrative overhead and allows the same personnel to handle both permitting and post-construction inspections, sending one person to a platform instead of two without sacrificing oversight quality. Rep. Kiggans asked the department to weigh national security concerns alongside the tangible energy and infrastructure benefits of offshore projects.

Rep. Nick Begich (R-AK) thanked Sec. Burgum for prioritizing tribal consultation in Alaska, noting that several Alaska Native groups had been unable to secure meetings with Interior under the previous secretary. He then raised the sea otter population explosion in Southeast Alaska, which he said is devastating shellfish, crab, and mariculture operations that Alaska Native communities and commercial fisherman depend on. He explained that a licensed tannery system under the Marine Mammal Protection Act Exists as both a cultural and management tool, but that federal reporting requirements are too burdensome for small operations to participate, effectively rendering the system unavailable. He asked Sec. Burgum to commit to working with his office to correct the reporting requirement while maintaining appropriate oversight. Sec. Burgum agreed. Rep. Begich then invited the Secretary to highlight Interior's accomplishments in Alaska, citing the March NPRA lease sale along with progress on PLO 5,150 conveyance, the ANWR leasing schedule, BLM permitting reforms, and the King Cove Road, noting the Financial Times had just named Alaska the hottest oil play in the world. Sec. Burgum framed Alaska's energy resources in geopolitical terms, arguing that Alaskan oil and gas could displace Middle Eastern energy for U.S. Pacific allies, as well as U.S. territories like Guam and Hawaii, reducing dependence on adversarial suppliers. He attributed the record lease sale to private sector geological work uncovering reserves in the National Petroleum Reserve Alaska potentially far larger than previously estimate, and



said the path forward requires permitting reform and infrastructure investment to fully unlock those resources for Alaska, the nation, the allied partners.

Rep. Celeste Maloy (R-UT) asked Sec. Burgum to commit to working with her team and the State of Utah on a plan for the President's proposed \$1 billion appropriation for the Great Salt Lake. Sec. Burgum agreed. Sec. Burgum added that there are significant opportunities in the Great Salt Lake basin on water supply, water infrastructure, and water conservation, noting again that the basin is unique because it flows into itself and is not part of the Colorado, Missouri, or Columbia systems. Rep. Maloy then asked Sec. Burgum if there is anything else he would like to say about staffing or solar power. Sec. Burgum responded to earlier comments about tribal issues and argued that many of the funding cuts included in the FY27 budget simply reflect reorganization. He argued that these resources and activities are simply being moved, not removed. Sec. Burgum additionally highlighted that DOI is consolidating comms, IT, and HR operations into the Secretary's office, not cutting them. Sec. Burgum argued that assertions that tribal communities have not been engaged with are false. He highlighted his work to resolve mineral rights issues with the Navajo Tribe weeks into his term.

Chairman Westerman brought the hearing to a close.