

Statement of Interior Subcommittee Chairman Mike Simpson  
Department of the Interior FY12 Budget Hearing  
Secretary Ken Salazar  
March 8, 2011

The Committee will come to order.

Mr. Secretary, I'd like to welcome you, along with David Hayes, and our good friend, Pam Haze, to today's subcommittee hearing addressing the fiscal year 2012 budget priorities for the Department of the Interior. Let me begin by wishing you a belated "Happy Birthday"—I understand your birthday was last week.

My colleagues and I hope to cover a lot of ground with you today on energy production, grazing, land acquisition, climate change, and other issues. From our recent conversations, I know that you are continuing to set an ambitious agenda for the Department on many fronts. And, while I don't agree with every decision you've made, I appreciate the fact that we can have a productive conversation about the issues. It's in that spirit that we look forward to today's hearing.

I'd like to begin by making several points on a few specific issues before we receive your testimony.

First, it's no secret that Western Members of both parties—including myself—have very strong objections to your Wild Lands Secretarial Order granting the BLM the authority to identify and manage lands in the West as wilderness. We've talked about this—I believe it's a troubling precedent. Only the Congress has the authority to designate wilderness. I can guarantee you that any bill emerging from this subcommittee this year will include a funding prohibition relating to the Wild Lands policy.

Secondly, the single largest increase in the Department's budget request falls within the Land and Water Conservation Fund—which is fully funded at \$900 million. My biggest concern is that the budget request proposes historic increases for land acquisition while also proposing dramatic reductions in other areas like maintenance of existing facilities,

construction (which is reduced by 46 percent Department-wide), and wildland fire (the DoI budget eliminates rural fire assistance and cuts hazardous fuels funding by \$49 million). A reasonable person could conclude that the Department is increasing land acquisition too quickly and at the expense of other very important and deserving priorities.

The last issue I'll mention is the most important—and that's energy. Oil prices have already risen by more than 10 percent this year and with the wave of unrest in the Middle East and North Africa, we are already seeing \$4/gallon gas in some areas of the United States. According to a March 3<sup>rd</sup> Rasmussen poll, 58 percent of the public is now convinced they'll be paying \$5 for a gallon of gas by July. The survey also found that 76 percent believe the United States does not do enough to develop its own gas and oil resources.

The moratorium put in place following the Deepwater Horizon accident was lifted last Fall but the Administration has issued just one deep water permit in the Gulf since that time—and that permit was issued just last week. A federal judge has called this *de facto* deep water drilling moratorium “unreasonable, unacceptable, and unjustified.”

The public will have no patience—and the Congress will have no patience—for more delays and more excuses as gas prices continue to rise, especially when we have untapped resources here in the United States not being utilized. We need to pursue domestic energy production on the grand scale of the Manhattan Project or putting a man on the moon so we can put people to work, boost domestic energy production, and lessen our dependence on foreign oil.

In closing, Mr. Secretary, no hearing with you would be complete without expressing thanks to your fine professional staff. The truth is that the committee couldn't do its work without the assistance of Pam Haze, the folks in your budget shop, and other professionals who work every day to find solutions to some very difficult challenges.

With that, I'm happy to yield to the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Moran, for any opening remarks he may have.