

Opening Statement of Interior Appropriations
Chairman Mike Simpson
Major Management Challenges at the
Department of the Interior
March 1, 2011

The Committee will come to order.

I want to welcome the Members of the subcommittee as well as our panel of witnesses this morning from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Department of the Interior's Office of Inspector General (OIG). I want to especially welcome the new members of the Subcommittee, Mrs. Lummis of Wyoming, Mr. Serrano of New York, and Mr. Flake of Arizona.

Our first witness today will be Ms. Anu Mittal, director of the Natural Resources and Environment Division at the GAO. She will be joined by Dr. Frank Rusco, also a director of the Natural Resources and Environment Division at the GAO. They will be followed by Ms. Mary Kendall, the Acting Inspector General at the Department of the Interior. We appreciate each of you appearing before the subcommittee this morning.

This morning's session marks the first of two dozen hearings that the Interior Subcommittee will hold between now and mid-April. Our primary focus throughout these hearings will be on oversight of the programs and budgets under this subcommittee's jurisdiction. Oversight is especially important this year as we ask agencies to prioritize their funding needs—to separate the “must haves” from the “nice-to-haves”—at this time of rising deficits and shrinking subcommittee allocations.

Assisting us in this effort will be the highly respected, non-partisan General Accountability Office (GAO) and several independent agency IGs. In hearings today, tomorrow, and next week, we will examine in detail programmatic concerns and management issues within the Department of the Interior, the Forest Service, and the EPA. We have asked our witnesses to identify and summarize specific concerns about

programs and policies within each agency. Together, the GAO and agency IG's will testify about the major management challenges facing these agencies so our subcommittee will be better informed to address these challenges and better prepared to write the subcommittee's fiscal year 2012 budget.

The issues highlighted by this morning's testimony point to some fundamental weaknesses within the Department of the Interior deserving of attention by the Appropriations Committee and this Congress. The same is true for the testimony we'll receive tomorrow relating to the EPA, and next week relating to the Forest Service. Taken together, this testimony will help Members formulate questions when we hear from EPA Administrator, Lisa Jackson, at this Thursday's budget hearing and from Interior Secretary, Ken Salazar, and Forest Service Chief, Tom Tidwell, at next week's budget hearings.

Because of the importance of today's testimony, the subcommittee is allocating 15 minutes each to the GAO and the IG for opening statements so they can adequately present their concerns for Members. We will first hear from the GAO and then from the Inspector General, followed by Member questions.

Before hearing from our witnesses, I'd first like to yield to Mr. Moran for any opening remarks he may have.