

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

# ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES



SENATOR MARIA CANTWELL, *Ranking Member*

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## **Opening Statement Senator Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) Hearing on the Nomination of Rep. Ryan Zinke to be Secretary of the Interior January 17, 2017**

“Thank you, Chairman Murkowski, and welcome to the former chair Frank Murkowski. Welcome to the new members of the committee, particularly on our side of the aisle—Sen. Duckworth and Sen. Cortez Masto. Thank you for being willing to serve on this committee. I also look forward to seeing Sen. Sessions on the committee; we’ll leave that for another day’s discussions. And thank you to our colleagues for coming to support the nomination of your colleague who has been nominated by the president-elect to be the Secretary of the Interior.

“Today, we are here to discuss the office of the Secretary of the Interior as one of the most important offices in the federal government, because it oversees our national parks, national wildlife refuges and our public lands, and it is responsible for protecting our nation’s trust obligations to Indian country and to insular areas that—frankly—get little attention here and deserve more attention.

“The Secretary is also responsible for much of our nation’s onshore and offshore mineral resources. And the Interior Department manages water resources in Western states, responsible for our nation’s hydropower system—something that Sen. Wyden and I are very keen on, as well as our colleague from Nevada. It is a far-reaching portfolio, it is growing, and it very much impacts our economy.

“One of the main responsibilities of the Secretary of the Interior is overseeing our national parks. The park system includes 417 areas covering more than 84 million acres in every state—with an annual operating budget of almost \$3 billion. The Park Service has more than 20,000 employees.

“But [the National Park System] is also America’s treasure. Our national parks drive an outdoor recreation economy that provides 6.1 million jobs in this country and \$646 billion in annual revenues. So never underestimate the value of public lands when it comes to recreation.

“Last year was the 100th anniversary of our national parks. While we passed a very modest improvement to our national parks management, I think a 100-year celebration deserves more, and I look forward to asking the nominee if he agrees with me on that.



“Americans want us to do more—to reinvest in these crown jewels, by providing jobs and recreational opportunities and—something I know we all can agree on—to fix the park maintenance backlog.

“One of the successes that the Senate had last Congress was passing bipartisan legislation preserving our special places through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. I believe that Congressman Zinke will have a chance to discuss that in his testimony, but I’m sure as an avid sportsman, he knows the value of our public lands and was enthusiastic about us trying to come up with bipartisan legislation to fix the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

“My constituents want to know: with a new administration, are these public lands going to face an unbelievable attack by those who would like to take these public lands away from us and turn them over back to states? Or are we going to continue to manage these resources for the incredible investment that they are and continue to improve them, so we get even more economic return?

“A second major responsibility of the Department of the Interior is the management of resource extraction from our federal lands and waters—more than 260 million onshore surface acres, 700 million subsurface acres and 1.7 billion acres in the Outer Continental Shelf.

“Today’s hearing is about determining whether this nominee is committed to making sure that we minimize environmental harm, that we pay for cleanup and that we have one fundamental principle that continues to be that ‘polluters pay’.

“There is, and continues to be, an opportunity for us to ensure that these public policies—according to the Government Accountability Office—are getting a fair return for the American taxpayer. We have seen, over time, problems in the fossil fuel program at Interior that GAO [Government Accountability Office] has said could cost taxpayers more than \$200 million in lost revenue each decade. The Obama administration took important steps to fix these problems.

“The Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster in 2010 exposed the consequences of failing to have these kinds of regulations.

“That disaster caused us to put in major reforms at the Department of the Interior to make sure that important oversight and regulations were not pushed aside and that we monitor these programs. I would have to say that the coal program is one that needs continued focus and attention. We’ll have a chance to talk about this today.



“The Obama administration adopted rules to ensure a fair return to taxpayers for our national mineral resources, requiring everyone to pay for mitigation for the damages they cause.

“Just today, the Government Accountability Office announced a new conclusion after reviewing multiple types of energy and natural resources. GAO found that coal mining alone gets very special treatment in the ability to have self-bonding for reclamation requirements. Everyone else—oil and gas producers, wind and solar developers and even hardrock miners—has to post cash or a third-party bond to make sure that they can provide the financial surety for the pollution that they would cause. This is something that needs to be addressed by the agency, and I would hope that our nominee would address this.

“Today’s hearing also affords Congressman Zinke the opportunity to demonstrate how he will uphold the trust and treaty obligations to the country’s 567 federally-recognized tribes. This includes overseeing the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Education and a more than \$2.5 billion budget in Indian Country.

“The reason, Madam Chair, I will take just a minute on this particular point is that our colleagues, many of whom serve on this committee also serve on Indian Affairs, will not have the same chance to point these important issues out to the nominee.

“But clearly, these issues of stewardship, as it relates to tribal lands, support for tribal education, social services and infrastructure, I think—regardless of the side of the aisle that you sit on—you will hear many things from people serving on Indian Affairs and Energy Committee about how important these issues are to the constituents we represent.

“It is also critical that we understand the nominee’s commitment to carrying out our nation’s obligations through Insular Affairs. And, as the chair mentioned, there are many issues that we will get to in the question and answer sessions. But I would like to bring up a few issues as it relates to the Pacific Northwest.

“There are issues where the climate has caused greater impacts on both drought and fire damage. This committee has taken bipartisan efforts to move forward on both of those issues, including collaborative efforts to make sure—in both Washington and Oregon—to do all that we can to plan for better resource management of our water supply and to build capacity for the future. And we have reached consensus here in the Senate, as well, on ways to stop fire borrowing and move forward on fuel reduction policies that would better serve our federal public lands.



“I would also mention—of particular importance to all of us in the Pacific Northwest—is the importance of re-committing to modernize the Columbia River Treaty, the management of our shared river water resources between the United States and Canada, based on the regional recommendation. It needs a lot of attention and direction, and we hope that we will have the chance to ask you questions about that, as well.

“Thank you, Madam Chair. I again congratulate the nominee and look forward to meeting his family as he makes his introductions.”

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