

Full Committee Hearing: Oversight of the Department of the Interior
Opening Statement of Senator Lisa Murkowski
June 6th, 2013

Thank you, Chairman Wyden, for calling this hearing today. And I'd like to welcome Secretary Jewell to her first hearing before this Committee as Secretary of the Interior.

Madame Secretary, first I want to thank you for arranging for Director Washburn to visit King Cove in late June. I also appreciate the commitment you have made to visit King Cove, yourself in August. I don't want to belabor the point but I am looking forward to visiting King Cove with you and introducing you first hand to my constituents. As you know, I feel strongly that they need and deserve a non-commercial gravel road to provide a land access route to the all-weather airport at nearby Cold Bay, as contemplated by the 2009 Omnibus Lands Act.

I have a number of questions to ask you today, on a whole range of issues involving your Department, and I will touch on a few of the most pressing issues just briefly now.

The Department is presiding over an environmental disaster in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska that must be remedied. More than 100 wells were drilled by the federal government and then simply abandoned. These "legacy wells" are full of contaminants that pollute the environment – and the federal government has all but abandoned its responsibility to clean up after itself.

BLM's annual budget has for many years contained base funding of only about \$1 million for cleaning up these wells. Yet the last two sites cost the agency \$2 million each to remediate. At this pace, it will take more than 100 years to clean up this mess. As I told you in person and at other recent hearings, that is categorically unacceptable – and so is the Administration's proposal to use Alaska's share of future NPR-A revenues for remediation.

A related concern is the pattern of falling production on federal lands. It's true that our nation is in the midst of an historic oil and gas boom. But it is also true that production on federal lands is in trouble. Contrary to some of the rhetoric we've heard, oil production from the federal estate actually fell five percent last year, after falling by even more than that in 2011. Natural gas production from the same federal areas, meanwhile, is in virtual free fall – down 8 percent last year, and down 23 percent since 2009.

America's energy boom is happening **in spite of** federal policies that stymie production. We should be opening new lands to development, making sure permits are approved on time, and preventing regulation and litigation from locking down our lands. And if anyone is looking for a place to start, I would suggest my home state of Alaska.

I also want to briefly mention the "sue and settle" tactic the Department has engaged in to enforce the Endangered Species Act. "Sue and settle" is alarming, and with decisions now due on hundreds of species, the economic consequences could be considerable.

Madame Secretary, you have a unique background in the oil and gas industry, in the private sector, and in the conservation community, and you have promised to bring stakeholders together to solve problems. I'm hopeful that you can bring a fresh perspective to help us move beyond some of these longstanding stalemates we have faced.