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## Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee considers Dr. James Reilly for USGS Director

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On March 6, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a hearing to consider the nomination of Dr. James Reilly to be Director of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) welcomed Dr. Reilly in her opening statement, acknowledging her initial surprise that an astronaut was nominated to run the USGS, an agency that mainly focuses on geology and deep Earth elements, but imparting her confidence in Dr. Reilly's extensive geoscience education and career. Senator Murkowski also emphasized that Dr. Reilly can help the USGS re-prioritize its core mandate, which is to be a geological survey.

Dr. Reilly delivered his prepared statement before the committee, describing his first interaction with the USGS in 1970 as a consumer of USGS maps and literature including groundbreaking satellite capabilities that ultimately became the LANDSAT Program. He shared how he has connections and experiences relating to most USGS mission areas, including work on marine ecosystems, critical minerals, water resources, and technologies like LANDSAT and 3DEP. Having management experience in the private, academic, government, and military sectors, Dr. Reilly noted a simple concept referred to as Three Question Management that he found to be effective for both small and large organizations. This management strategy, as he described it, involves defining roles and expectations and following three questions to track progress: do you have a plan, is it working, and are you ahead or behind? Dr. Reilly stated that if confirmed to be USGS Director, he would strive to follow those principles.

Senators at the hearing questioned Dr. Reilly about protecting scientific integrity, defending USGS funding, and specific issues facing their respective states. When Senator Murkowski asked if the USGS has strayed from its original mission and if there are redundancies in the agency, Dr. Reilly replied that he will spend his first 30 days as Director meeting with leaders of the various mission areas and programs to determine whether current initiatives align with the agency's intended functions as defined in the Organic Act. Dr. Reilly also promised to work with Senator Murkowski's staff to advance our understanding of critical minerals and to maintain USArray seismic monitors in Alaska. Ranking Member Maria Cantwell (D-WA) shared her concern about defending scientific integrity at the USGS, citing the example of the recent departure of two lead scientists prompted by pressure to share findings of a resource assessment of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A) with Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke before public release. Dr. Reilly assured the committee he is fully committed to defending scientific integrity as "science drives good policy, and good science has to be there for good policy to be made". Senator Cantwell also expressed her concern with the President's budget proposal for fiscal year (FY) 2019, which proposes a 25 percent cut to USGS workforce and 20 percent reduction to the survey overall. Dr. Reilly reiterated his plan to meet with USGS mission areas in his first 30 days to determine how to meet budget challenges.

In response to questions from Senators Cortez Masto (D-NV) and Tina Smith (D-MN) about how proposed budget cuts to USGS in the President's fiscal year (FY) 2019 request would affect partnerships, particularly with academic institutions, Dr. Reilly agreed to provide insights after arriving at the USGS and reiterated his understanding that partnerships give students the opportunity to conduct real-world science and provide the agency with a fresh set of eyes. Other senators shared concerns about cuts proposed in the President's FY 2019 budget and highlighted the importance of these initiatives to their states. Topics of concern included stream gauges for predicting flash floods, regional science centers, and the need for domestic sources of critical minerals, given China's dominance of the supply of many critical minerals.

Dr. Reilly now awaits a committee vote, and then must be confirmed by the full Senate before he can take office.

The Senate still has not scheduled votes on the nominees to lead the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The Senate also faces a busy schedule to confirm a new secretary of state and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director after President Donald Trump recently fired Secretary of State Rex

Tillerson and proposed moving Mike Pompeo from the CIA to the State Department.

To track the progress of key geoscience nominees, please visit AGI's federal nominations page at

<https://www.americangeosciences.org/policy/federal-nominations>.

*Sources: Department of the Interior, Earth & Space Science News, E&E News, National Public Radio, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources*

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