

Hearing to Review Programs and Activities of the Department of the Interior

Witness:

The Honorable Sally Jewell

Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior

Committee Members Present:

Ron Wyden (D-OR), Chairman

Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Ranking Member

Martin Heinrich (D-NM)

John Barrasso (R-WY)

Al Franken (D-MN)

Tim Scott (R-SC)

Mike Lee (R-UT)

Joe Manchin (D-WV)

James Risch (R-ID)

Rob Portman (R-OH)

On June 6, 2013, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a full committee hearing to review programs and activities of the Department of the Interior (DOI). Witness testimony was from Sally Jewell, the new Secretary of the Department of the Interior, who spoke in broad terms about the various programs and activities of the Department, as well as the issues the DOI will face in the future. Although the scope of the hearing was broad, testimony and questions focused on specific issues facing members' constituents and how the DOI would respond to these issues.

In his opening remarks, Chairman Ron Wyden (D-OR) praised the Administration's fiscal year (FY) 2014 proposed budget for the Department of the Interior, which would represent a nearly 3 percent increase from enacted 2012 levels. He then went on to highlight his support for the Administration's commitment to several aspects of the DOI, such as the conservation of public lands and renewable energy. He also urged Secretary Jewell to stay committed to these programs, such as the New Energy Frontier. Although questions from the members tended to focus on regionally specific issues directly affecting their constituents, oil and natural gas production was the most common theme. Ranking Member Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) first addressed the issue in her opening remarks, where she voiced concerns about falling oil and natural gas production on federal lands, citing figures indicating a five percent decrease in oil production from last year, and an 8 percent decrease since last year – a 23 percent decrease since 2009 – in natural gas production. Secretary Jewell disagreed with this statement, indicating that onshore oil production on federal lands was "the highest in years." Ultimately, Senator Murkowski suggested that the decline was due to a decrease in offshore production that more than offset the increase in onshore production, and expressed concern and a need to "look at the full picture" when discussing these matters.

Questions from Senator John Barrasso (R-WY), Senator Al Franken (D-MN), and Senator Rob Portman (R-OH) focused on hydraulic fracturing and on the Bureau of Land Management's revised proposed Oil and Gas; Well Stimulation, Including Hydraulic Fracturing, on Federal and Indian Lands rule. Barrasso expressed concern that because industry could receive variance from states with equal or greater regulation, the rule was "unnecessary," and it was "unclear why federal regulation is needed on top of state regulation." Secretary Jewell stated that the purpose of the rule was to provide minimum standards for hydraulic fracturing on public lands. Franken and Portman both had questions about the permitting process, with Sen. Franken asking about the consideration of water issues when issuing permits, and Portman expressing concern about the length of the permitting processes, even in states with good regulations.

Senator Mike Lee (R-UT) also had questions related to oil shale, specifically whether the Department would uphold the 2012 Oil Shale and Tar Sands Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, or whether it would take a fresh look at the program to see if it complies with the Energy Policy Act of 2005. Both Secretary Jewell and Deputy Secretary David Hayes indicated that the Department would uphold the most recent rule, stating that there are 600,000 acres available for development, and they are prepared to defend the 2012 rule.

Opening statements and witness testimony, as well as an archived video of the hearing, are available on the Energy and Natural Resource Committee website.

