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Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee: DOI FY 2016 budget hearing February 24, 2015

On February 24, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held a hearing on the President's proposed fiscal year (FY) 2016 budget for the Department of the Interior (DOI). Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and Deputy Secretary Mike Connor answered senators' questions regarding several of the President's FY 2016 priorities, including natural gas on public lands, coal royalties, and water resources.

During the hearing Secretary Jewell addressed whether federal or state law would take precedence for regulating hydraulic fracturing on federal lands, testifying that the federal rules are meant as a baseline. In states with stronger hydraulic fracturing regulations, those rules take precedence over federal rules. Jewell emphasized the agency's support for oil and natural gas development on federal lands, explaining the importance of funding for inspections to allow the permitting process to move faster. Jewell also expressed interest in creating more gas gathering lines on federal lands to help prevent flaring and venting of natural gas.

Conversely, Ranking Member Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) raised concerns over coal royalties on public lands where companies can lease land for \$1, while the federal government incurs \$70 in costs of cleaning up after coal mining.

In addition, The Land & Water Conservation Fund is celebrating its 50th anniversary. Senator Wyden praised the FY 2016 budget proposal to fully fund that program, and the provision of \$58 million dollars for WaterSMART's work particularly in addressing drought.

This hearing was the first in a series of hearings that will examine the President's FY 2016 budget request before Congress submits their own proposals later this spring.
