

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

January 7, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

Thank you for your New Year's Eve letter. Your assessment of the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-94) is, in many respects, welcome.

As you say, the increased funding provided will "enhance conservation stewardship," and "increase access to outdoor recreation," among other important goals. For most Interior spending accounts, the legislation provides significant increases over what you and President Trump proposed, so I am glad your view has changed. Overcoming strong opposition from 112 House Republicans and 21 Republican Senators who voted against the measure was challenging, but those who champion robust conservation funding prevailed.

Your claim that the Department may pursue relocation of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) headquarters to Senator Gardner's (R-CO) state "with no limitation" is mistaken, however. Congress has clearly stated that, "The Department has not fulfilled its obligation to fully communicate the organizational and financial details of the reorganization and relocation of the Bureau's Washington, DC headquarters," and directed the Department "to begin monthly briefings with the Committees on Appropriations on the status of the reorganization, including in an initial briefing explaining the Bureau's plan for ensuring continuity of agency operations and addressing the immediate impacts of likely staff shortages caused by the reorganization."¹ Furthermore, the law rejected the Administration's budget request for additional funding to facilitate the Department's reorganization, including the relocation of BLM staff away from the national capital region, providing no additional money for Administrative Support. Congress expects your compliance.

I am pleased you reviewed my recent remarks expressing my frustration at your Department's stonewalling, avoidance, and denial of my repeated requests for information regarding the merits of the proposed relocation. Please take my comments to heart.

¹ <https://appropriations.house.gov/sites/democrats.appropriations.house.gov/files/HR%201865%20-%20Division%20D%20-%20Interior%20SOM%20FY20.pdf>

I contacted the Department regarding the full DOI reorganization and sent letters and document requests regarding the BLM reorganization on July 23, September 25, November 14, December 4, and December 16, and held a full committee oversight hearing regarding the BLM reorganization on September 10. In each instance I made, or reiterated, requests to review the financial and statistical information supporting this move. You and other senior Departmental officials have stated that the data we are seeking exists, but have refused to provide it.

Specifically, we have requested a complete cost benefit analysis and financial justification for this move, analysis of employee retention and potential disparate impacts on protected classes of employees, continuity plans for agency operations, documentation of consultation with sovereign tribal nations, overall cost estimates and other supporting information.

Your New Year's Eve letter is part of a pattern whereby we request data and you offer to meet for a discussion. Your feelings about moving BLM headquarters to Colorado are clear and I do not require a meeting to discuss them. What I require is the supporting data you say you have, but will not provide.

This stonewalling, avoidance, and denial leads to only two possible conclusions: either the Department has not done its homework on the proposed move, despite claims to the contrary, or worse, it has done its homework, and the review proves the move cannot be justified on either efficiency or fiscal grounds.

As your letter demonstrates, Congress has a clear legislative purpose in reviewing this proposed BLM relocation and is therefore entitled to the information we have repeatedly requested. We will continue to use every investigative and oversight tool at our disposal to obtain the information we are seeking.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
Committee on Natural Resources