

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

October 17, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

On August 18 of this year, the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) sent a letter to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NAS) ordering a cessation of all work on a \$1 million public health project titled *Potential Human Health Effects of Surface Coal Mining Operations in Central Appalachia*. The OSMRE letter stated that this was a result of a Department of the Interior (DOI) review of grants and cooperative agreements in excess of \$100,000, even though the NAS and DOI have not reported any other grants or cooperative agreements similarly halted.

One week after the letter was sent to the NAS, I and several of my House colleagues sent you a letter requesting that the study be reinstated. So far, we have not received a response. According to the NAS, as of last week they had not received any further information from OSMRE or DOI about the study, and repeated inquiries by my staff in recent weeks to OSMRE and DOI about the study have gone unanswered.

If the true purpose of the cessation order to NAS was to address the budget situation at DOI, which seems doubtful, you should be able to provide information at this time about the status of the remaining \$400,000 on the study's cooperative agreement. The study was awarded to NAS with Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 funds from OSMRE; since OSMRE is given two fiscal years to spend its appropriation, any funding not obligated by the end of FY 2017 is lost to the agency. Since FY 2017 ended on September 30, 2017, DOI must be able to provide an accounting of the remaining \$400,000 at this time, yet it has refused to do so. If that money was spent elsewhere, the American people and Congress deserve to know where that money went. If the money was not spent elsewhere, the American people and Congress deserve to know why the Department chose to waste the \$600,000 that had already been spent on this crucial public health study.

It increasingly appears as if DOI ended the study because of fears that it would conclusively show that mountaintop removal (MTR) coal mining is a serious threat to the health of people living in Appalachia. Cutting off funding for a scientific study because it will likely produce uncomfortable results for powerful administration allies is unconscionable, especially when these political games are affecting public health. Sadly, as we have seen so far this year, this administration routinely suppresses science that doesn't agree with its ideology. This makes

it all the more important to demand answers about these attempts to hide the truth, particularly when human health and lives are at stake.

Since the deadline for OSMRE to re-obligate the remaining funding for the NAS study has already passed, I ask you to please immediately provide information on the status of that funding, including a detailed explanation of why it was repurposed or allowed to expire.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Raúl M. Grijalva". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "R".

Raúl M. Grijalva
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources