

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

February 27, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We are writing about a reported request to access an energy assessment ahead of its release to the public in possible contravention of United States Geological Survey's (USGS) guidelines.¹ Dr. Murray Hitzman, USGS Associate Director of the Energy and Minerals Program, attributed his recent abrupt resignation to the USGS "providing the final results of the energy assessment of the National Petroleum Reserve Alaska (NPRA) to the Secretary of the Interior several days in advance of the information's public release, in contradiction of (his) interpretation of U.S.G.S. fundamental science policy."² DOI Deputy Secretary David Bernhardt reportedly made the request for the data ahead of its public release.³

It is longstanding USGS policy that "Particularly sensitive results, however, such as energy and mineral resource assessments and mineral commodity reports that typically have significant economic implications are not disclosed or shared in advance of public release because pre-release in these cases could result in unfair advantage or the perception of unfair advantage."⁴

According to one report, despite being warned of the ethical implications in a prior meeting, DOI made a request for the NPRA data from USGS on or after Friday, December 15, 2017. USGS was reportedly prepared to comply with the request and argued the Secretary had the legal right

¹ Geological Survey Manual, 502.5, Fundamental Science Practices: Safeguarding Unpublished U.S. Geological Survey Data, Information, and Associated Scientific Materials, 1992, <https://www2.usgs.gov/usgs-manual/500/502-5.html> U.S.

² Hitzman, Murray. Received by William Werkheiser, 17 Dec., 2017.
<https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/4383857/Hitzman-Letter-redacted2.pdf>

³ Federman, Adam. "A Government Scientist Resigned in Protest after the Trump Administration Demanded Sensitive Oil Data." *Mother Jones*, Foundation for National Progress, 21 Feb. 2018, www.motherjones.com/environment/2018/02/usgs-interior-zinke-alaska/.

⁴ Geological Survey Manual, 502.5, Fundamental Science Practices: Safeguarding Unpublished U.S. Geological Survey Data, Information, and Associated Scientific Materials, 1992, <https://www2.usgs.gov/usgs-manual/500/502-5.html> U.S.

to see it ahead of its public release.⁵ It was allegedly not until Dr. Hitzman submitted his resignation on December 17th, 2017 that DOI suddenly reversed its pursuit, claiming it was never requested.⁶

If reports are true, the incident would be the latest in a troubling series of attacks on scientific integrity and ethical lapses, at DOI.

To assist with our oversight duties, please provide the following information and documents:

1. Do USGS guidelines about early release of sensitive data apply to you and to Deputy Secretary Bernhardt? If not, please explain why not.
2. Did DOI request the NPRA assessment from USGS ahead of its public release? Who made the request? Please provide a copy of the request from DOI to USGS.
3. What was the intended use of the assessment? Why was it needed ahead of time? Was there an intent to alter the data or share it with anyone outside the agency?
4. Did DOI review the assessment before it was released to the public?
5. All correspondence within and between the Secretary's office, Deputy Secretary's office, and USGS regarding the potential early delivery of the National Petroleum Reserve Alaska assessment to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary.
6. All memoranda that discuss the potential early delivery of the National Petroleum Reserve Alaska assessment to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary.
7. All notes or minutes from meetings in which the potential early delivery of National Petroleum Reserve Alaska assessment to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary was discussed.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources



A. Donald McEachin
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and
Investigations

⁵ Federman, Adam. "A Government Scientist Resigned in Protest after the Trump Administration Demanded Sensitive Oil Data." *Mother Jones*, Foundation for National Progress, 21 Feb. 2018, www.motherjones.com/environment/2018/02/usgs-interior-zinke-alaska/.

⁶ Id