

Testimony before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
"Trump Administration Broken Promises on Renewable Energy"
Kate Kelly, Center for American Progress
September 22, 2020 - 12pm ET

Good afternoon.

Thank you, Congressman Lowenthal and Members of the Committee, for holding this hearing.

My name is Kate Kelly, and I am the public lands director at the Center for American Progress. Prior to this, I served in the Obama administration at the Interior Department.

There are two simple points I'd like to convey during my time:

- First, we need clean, renewable energy in order to fight climate change and strengthen our economy, and;
- Second, the Trump administration is actively stifling wind and solar energy development on public lands and waters.

Public lands and waters have an important role to play in accelerating our nation's transition to clean energy. They boast some of the best wind and solar resources in the world, and - importantly - there are paths to harness that energy in an environmentally responsible way.

But decades of policies and politics that heavily favor fossil fuel extraction have tilted the scales so that public lands and waters are part of the climate change problem, not part of the solution. In fact, the U.S. Geological Survey found that energy extraction on federally managed lands and oceans has been contributing about seven times more greenhouse gas emissions than they have been absorbing.

We need to flip that equation, but it will require a major paradigm shift in how and why we manage these places that belong to all Americans.

The Obama administration began that work. They stood up and staffed onshore and offshore renewable energy programs at the Interior Department. They approved dozens of wind, solar, and geothermal energy projects with the potential to power millions of homes. They conducted landscape-level planning - creating solar energy zones in the southwest, and wind energy areas in the Atlantic Ocean - ensuring projects could be sited in areas with high energy potential and low environmental conflict. They held first-of-their-kind competitive lease sales. And they built a framework for renewable energy development to provide industry and stakeholders with shared rules of the road.

But there was much more to be done when they handed the keys over to the Trump administration. Which brings me to my second point:

The Trump administration's Interior Department has done little to nothing to advance responsible renewable energy development. Whatever the reasons for this - whether it stems from sheer neglect or outright hostility, or a little of both - the impacts are the same. The Trump administration has stunted the growth of a growing industry and impeded the nation's ability to tackle climate change.

My colleague and I reviewed the Interior Department's activities during the Trump administration and found that they had approved about half as many wind and solar energy projects than the Obama administration had at the same point in the first term.

While that statistic received the most attention from the media, other findings are perhaps just as troubling. The Trump administration has:

- Eliminated the Bureau of Land Management's renewable energy office and scattered the remaining career experts across the West;
- Scrapped the landmark Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan and missed opportunities to create new Designated Leasing Areas - both tools designed to provide certainty to developers and stakeholders alike;
- Failed to hold a single onshore renewable energy lease sale; and
- Thrown up roadblocks to slow or stop proposed wind and solar projects.

I am happy to elaborate on any of these findings, but it all adds up to a waste of four years and a missed opportunity to create jobs and transition to a clean energy economy.

I should note that the dismantling of the Interior Department's renewable energy programs has come at the same time the Trump administration has rolled out the red carpet for the oil and gas industry - holding massive lease sales, offering breaks on royalty payments, writing oil and gas into every land management plan, and rolling back any standard perceived to be a hurdle to fossil fuel development. The treatment of the two energy industries could not be more starkly different.

I'll close by offering that - regardless of the outcome in November - there is a promising opportunity for Congress to strengthen the renewable energy program at the Interior Department. The Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act, a bill that enjoys support from a bipartisan set of members on this committee, would clean up loose ends left by the existing competitive wind and solar energy rule, and make for an enduring renewable energy development program at the Bureau of Land Management.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for your time.