

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

May 25, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

Earlier this week, the *Washington Post* reported that officials within the Interior Department ordered employees at the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to remove a reference to climate change from a press release announcing the publication of a new study on sea level rise and coastal flooding. Particularly given the already dismal track record of the Trump Administration on the issue of scientific independence, this is a troubling development.

Scientists agree – and the scientists who conducted this study believed it was important to emphasize – that sea level rise is being driven by carbon pollution and climate change. Understanding this direct connection has serious implications for how we solve the critical and challenging public safety, public health, and economic problems associated with sea level rise and increased coastal flooding. Scrubbing this press release over the objections of some of the scientists involved in the study deprived media outlets and the general public of the context of the study.

This type of activity is unacceptable. Corporate polluters and the big oil lobby are continuing their misinformation campaign designed to cast doubt upon the kind of top-notch science that this and other USGS studies represent. Mr. Trump has aided that campaign and now, more than ever, the public needs reassurance that his Administration will not persecute scientists or suppress the findings of their work.

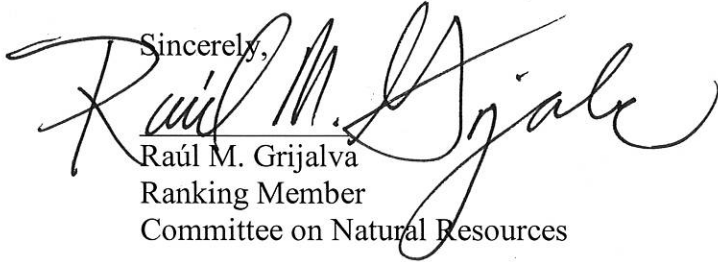
You are responsible for ensuring that the many talented and dedicated scientists within the Interior Department are able to do their jobs and report the results of their research without political interference. In order to prevent future abuses of this kind, I request responses to the following questions:

1. Did Acting Deputy Secretary of the Interior James Cason, or anyone in his office, or at the Office of Management and Budget, review the USGS press release before it was issued?

2. If so, who made the decision to remove the line reported by the authors of the study to read: "Global climate change drives sea-level rise, increasing the frequency of coastal flooding."?
3. If not, what was the highest level Departmental office that reviewed and edited the press release?

Please respond to these questions no later than June 9, 2017. If you have questions, please have your staff contact Matt Strickler on the Democratic Staff of the Natural Resources Committee at (202) 225-6065.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources