

**Chairman Lisa A. Murkowski Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related
Agencies**

Hearing to Review the FY2020 Budget Request for the U.S. Department of Interior

May 22, 2019

(As delivered)

Good morning to everyone. It is indeed a beautiful day. Thank you, Secretary Bernhardt for being here before the Committee as we review the fiscal year 2020 budget request for the Department of the Interior. Secretary welcome, this is your first appearance before this Subcommittee. During your tenure as Deputy Secretary, and now as Secretary, we've had the chance to work together on many of the issues that are really very important to Alaska, as we're working to develop responsibly our resources, address the many, many issues that face our Native peoples, the environmental issues that we face such as remediation of legacy wells, and certainly better management of our federal lands. We're making progress, but I think we know that there is always more to do.

The Department administers many programs that impact Alaskans while also being responsible for stewardship of much of the federal lands that comprise over 60 percent of our state. Alaskans need the Department to be a reliable partner, and I sincerely appreciate your commitment and attention the attention that you have provided to our Alaska.

The FY 2020 budget request for the Department of the Interior is \$11.5 billion for programs within the jurisdiction of the Interior subcommittee. That is roughly \$1.6 billion below the enacted level, that's a reduction of 12 percent. And while I do support many of the components in this budget request, there are also some areas, some portions that raise concern. But like every President's budget request, we know that this is a proposal and that Congress will enact the final budget for the Department.

So lots of issues this morning. You will hear from myself, from my colleagues. I'd like to hear more about the Department's proposed Reorganization. I am generally supportive of all executive agencies taking a hard look at their internal processes and work to improve efficiency and coordination within their agency. Now that you have taken over as Secretary, I am interested in learning more about your plan for the proposed Reorganization and the details of the steps you are taking to implement it.

The request rightfully calls for significant and continued investment in energy security, mineral security, and responsible development. Promoting domestic energy production creates American jobs, generates revenues, and a return on the taxpayer dollars, as well as certainly, the very critical focus of enhancing national security. Equally important is critical mineral development and protection. The request recognizes the importance of critical minerals, in part by proposing to begin an OCS Critical Mineral Inventory. Know that I support and applaud the Administration

for prioritizing the need to reduce our nation's dependence on foreign sources for critical minerals.

I am also hopeful that the Department will find a way to move forward with a new five-year plan for offshore leasing that includes Alaska. I strongly disagree and I've said so previously, with the recent District Court decision on the Arctic OCS which reinstates President Obama's end of office decision to withdraw the vast majority of the Beaufort Sea and all of the Chukchi Sea from responsible development. As we have seen production fall in Alaska, foreign imports have grown significantly in states like California and others. We certainly can and should reverse this trend and safe Arctic development, including in ANWR and NPR-A, will help achieve that. I trust the Department to find the best pathway forward with the new five-year plan and Responsible development of our Arctic resources.

So in other news for Alaska, I do appreciate that this request, unlike those in years past, does not propose a cut to the Alaska conveyance program. This is something that I've been working on since I came to the Senate. In fact I believe it was my first really significant legislation that we put in place that said, we're going to complete the conveyances that are owned to the State of Alaska and to our Native peoples and we're going to do it by the fiftieth year of Statehood. Well I think this year, is now our sixtieth year. We're still working on that commitment and that promise, but we have waited a long time and the fact that both the State and our Native people are owed title conveyance of still millions of acres of land from the federal government is something that has been a real raw spot. So, know that each year we fought to fund this program, and I am glad to see the Administration has backed away from attempts to cut it.

When we speak about our Native peoples, I think it's important to recognize that my home, is home to one-half of all federally recognized tribes. They call Alaska home. The Bureau of Indian Affairs provides essential programs for Alaska Natives that are fundamental to the federal government's legal obligations to our First Peoples. I have been concerned by some of the proposed reductions that we see within the BIA – this is particularly regarding the elimination of the Small and Needy tribes and the housing programs, as well as proposed decreases to important human services, natural resources, real estate, and construction programs. So these are going to be areas that I'm going to be asking you about this morning. Know that I want to work with you to ensure that all these programs are properly funded so that we can meet our trust responsibilities. I've made a real effort over the recent years to do more with Tribal Court funding. I know that's an issue that my colleague here and actually many on this Committee support and we're pleased to see that, that is included in this year's budget.

I was pleased to see the Administration proclaim May 5 as Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Native Awareness Day. This is an issue again that many of us on the Committee who serve not only on this Subcommittee, but serve on the Indian Affairs Committee have been very concerned about what we have come to learn about this. Some would describe it as an epidemic. You don't have statistics like we have with our Native American, Alaska Native women without having a very, very serious problem around the country. So, as we work together to develop and implement strategies to help, I think it is important that we focus on these rural areas that so many lack adequate public safety. They face high rates of violence, abuse, murder,

trafficking. It's going to take a lot of coordination. It's going to take a lot of communication and the resources to address this and do it right. So we look forward to working with you on that.

Of course we cannot talk about funding needs for public lands without addressing deferred maintenance. This is a problem across the Department. We have worked in this Subcommittee to help address backlog maintenance issues. But quite frankly we just don't have enough discretionary funding available to solve the problem. The principles behind this budget request's Public Lands Infrastructure Fund proposal, as well as the Restore Our Parks Act, which Senator Alexander has championed, along with Senator Portman, some others, that would certainly help to address the difficulties that we face in finding the resources. You and I have had several discussions about the need to address the deferred maintenance backlog at our nation's parks and our refuges as well. So know that you've got a lot of eager folks on this Committee willing to work with you and certainly in my role as Chairman of the Energy Committee. We want to make sure that this very significant issue is addressed.

There are a number of topics I hope to learn more about today, including how the proposal fulfills our commitment to science and addressing natural hazards as well as meeting our goal of better stewardship of public lands. So, a lot of ground to cover. We don't have as much time as we would probably like within the Committee. I know that there are other Subcommittees that are meeting this morning as well, so we will try to get through our business as quickly as we can. With that, I turn to my Ranking Member and friend, Senator Udall.

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