

Chairman Lisa A. Murkowski Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Markup of the FY2019 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill

June 12, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning. I'd like to welcome members here today for the subcommittee markup of the Fiscal Year 2019 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

This bill includes funding for all of the major federal land management agencies -- the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Forest Service, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

It also provides funding for essential Indian health, education, and resource management programs through the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service, and funding for important cultural institutions like the Smithsonian Institution, the National Gallery of Art, and the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities.

The Administration's request for the 2019 Interior bill is approximately \$28.3 billion, a roughly 22.5% percent reduction from the FY 2018 enacted level. The Subcommittee's 302(b) allocation for FY 2019 is \$35.85 billion which is \$600 million more than last year.

This may sound like a sizeable increase but the subcommittee had certain program increases that could not be avoided, such as an additional \$500 million for fire suppression, an additional \$109 million for contract support costs in Indian Country, and \$115 million for staffing costs associated with new health care facilities operated by the Indian Health Service or by tribes under compact agreements.

This bill adopts a similar approach to the FY 2018 Interior bill by rejecting unwarranted decreases proposed in the budget and making investments in our highest priorities -- especially infrastructure investments for the land management agencies, Indian Country, and wastewater and drinking water improvements. For example, we built upon the \$150 million increase provided for the National Park Service construction program -- the largest percentage increase ever for this program - by maintaining the increase from FY 2018 plus providing an additional \$5 million.

In the two main agencies that deliver services for the Indian community -- the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service - we restored proposed cuts of over a billion dollars to critical program funding for Indian Country. We were able to increase funding for the IHS Facilities program which funds construction, maintenance, and sanitation facilities improvements. We provided substantial funding for the BIA to help with the construction of Indian schools, irrigation systems, and public safety facilities. For both accounts, we provide the fully estimated level of contract support costs and maintain an indefinite appropriation account structure so that if these costs are higher than estimated, other programs won't be tapped to pay for them.

In the Indian Health Service, we also provided \$10 million in critical new funding to provide grants to tribes for combating the opioid crisis. The Center for Disease Control has reported that American Indians and Alaska Natives consistently had the highest drug overdose death rate by race every year

from 2008-2015. When looking at opioids specifically, overdoses have increased four-fold during this time frame.

For Wildland Fire management programs, we have provided a total of \$4.35 billion for the Department of the Interior and the Forest Service. This fully funds the 10-year average for firefighting costs and provides \$900 million in additional suppression funds above the 10-year average based on recent catastrophic seasons and the latest forecasting models.

We took a common sense approach to the EPA's budget and focused resources on programs that do concrete things to improve the quality of the environment for the public. The bill provides additional funding to states who have delegated responsibility for environmental programs. It provides slightly more than last year's level for the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds, which build critical water infrastructure in communities across the country. The WIFIA program - which leverages federal funds for water infrastructure projects - receives \$63 million. When used in combination with the SRF's, the bill provides the EPA with a powerful suite of tools to improve the quality of life for people around the country.

This bill provides \$500 million for PILT funding, which is the fully estimated amount needed for this program in FY 2019. This maintains the subcommittee's commitment to fully meeting the needs of local communities for county roads, public safety, and schools through the PILT program.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) receives \$425 million equal to the enacted level, including \$124 million for the NPS State side program, as well as additional funding for recreational access and the American Battlefield program.

Unlike previous years, the bill does not include new policy provisions that were not in the FY 2018 enacted bill. Working with Chairman Shelby, Vice Chairman Leahy, and Ranking Member Udall, we assembled a package that both sides can support in Committee, with the ultimate goal of taking the bill to the Senate floor. That has not happened since fiscal year 2010. It is time to return to regular order and I look forward to moving the Interior bill through the process in a fashion which allows all members of the Senate to have an opportunity to debate the bill and offer amendments.

Let me close by expressing my appreciation to the Ranking Member of the subcommittee, Senator Udall. He and his staff have been a pleasure to work with, and have helped to shape this bill so that it reflects the priorities of members on both sides of the aisle.

Before I turn to Senator Udall, I think I can speak for both of us when I say that, if there is no objection, we would appreciate it if members could hold off on amendments until the full committee markup on Thursday.

Subcommittee staff will be available to work with all of you in preparing a manager's package for that mark up, so we ask that you let us know as soon as possible of any amendments that you may want to offer.

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