

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 24, 2018

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

Dear Secretary Zinke,

We are writing to you today as Members of the House Appropriations Committee to inquire about recent reports that your department dismissed certain evidence that contradicted the Administration's position on National Monument Designations. This issue is of great concern to us and we are asking for more information about this potentially drastic abuse within the review process in the Executive Branch.

As you know, your Department was instructed to review 27 national monuments established over a period of 21 years. Many of us argued at that time that this was a waste of taxpayer dollars and an overreach of power, given that these monuments had been designated after years of community input and careful review. The inadvertently released documents we have just seen have confirmed our concerns that taxpayer resources were being used for partisan ends.

It has been reported that many pieces of data that did not build a case of support for the Administration's effort to restrict or revise monuments were deleted from the review. Internal communications show a clear intention to disregard information that would be supportive of maintaining current boundaries such as estimates of increased tourism revenue, impacts on fishing operators, and reports about reduced crime and vandalism rates at monuments were gathered.

These deletions seem to show that the Administration was merely looking for a way to justify its ideological goals of reducing the size of these monuments to allow for increased energy development and resource extraction in National Monuments. Rather than being a full, unbiased accounting of the impact of National Monuments, this review cherry-picked data to build the Administration's case and ignored information that would undercut it. Again, we would argue that such a review, which was clearly intended to be biased was a waste of taxpayers dollars and the valuable time of Interior Department officials.

Although there is some discussion about the information that was redacted as part of the FOIA request on the agency, that is not the subject of our inquiry today. We are focused on the actual review process itself and what your Department did, or did not do, during the process to ensure that a "fair and balanced" review was taking place.

For these reasons, we would like to hear directly from you about what happened. In particular, we would like to know the process used to gather information, how information was chosen for inclusion in the report, the basis for information to be "ignored" or "deleted," and how the Administration plans to move forward in light of this newly public information.

Rather than rely on reports in the press, we would like these answers from you. We look forward to your quick response to this issue.

Sincerely,



Nita M. Lowey
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress