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**Committee:** House Appropriations Interior, Environment & Related Agencies Subcommittee  
**Event:** [Budget Hearing - Department of the Interior](#)  
**Date:** April 20, 2026

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**Executive Summary:** On April 20, 2026, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment & Related Agencies held a hearing to review the Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) budget requests for the Department of the Interior (DOI). Interior Secretary Doug Burgum provided testimony.

In general, Republican members praised DOI for cutting bureaucratic red tape, streamlining permitting, and prioritizing "American energy dominance" through increased oil, gas, and baseload power production to meet the growing energy demands of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Democratic members fiercely criticized the administration for proposed budget cuts to the National Park Service (NPS) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the cancellation of offshore wind projects, and the rolling back of environmental regulations.

**Member Toplines:<sup>1</sup>**

*Subcommittee Chair Michael Simpson (R-ID-02):* Simpson opened by outlining his priorities, including domestic energy production, securing critical minerals, expanding recreational access to public lands, and ensuring adequate funding for wildland firefighters.

*Subcommittee Ranking Member Chellie Pingree (D-ME-01):* Pingree was highly critical of the administration and Burgum during the hearing, accusing DOI of abandoning its conservation mission to serve oil and gas interests. She specifically called attention to the administration's attacks on all renewable energy - especially offshore wind development — alleging an elimination of competition for oil and gas while reducing overall energy production. Referencing the administration's [settlement with Total Energies](#) over offshore wind, she described a "dirty deal" made at the expense of the American people.

*Full Committee Chair Tom Cole (R-OK-04):* Cole applauded Secretary Burgum's efforts to cut red tape and enhance American competitiveness. At the same time, he stressed the importance of the DOI's role in managing national parks and upholding tribal trust responsibilities, warning that funding reductions for tribal services have serious consequences.

*Full Committee Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT-03):* DeLauro was similarly critical of the administration, arguing that the department's proposed budget slashes funding for public lands and clean energy to pave the way for corporate exploitation. She took particular issue with the department's proposal to zero out funding for renewable energy, arguing it would put the U.S. at a competitive disadvantage against China in the "green energy economy."

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<sup>1</sup> Opening statements for Chairs Cole and Simpson, as well as Ranking Member DeLauro and Pingree were not available at the time of this memo's distribution.

### ***Witness Topline:***

[Doug Burgum, Secretary, DOI](#): Burgum defended the FY27 budget request, stating it focuses on American energy dominance, law and order, and making public lands accessible. He highlighted several structural changes, including the creation of a unified U.S. Wildland Fire Service and the reunification of offshore mineral management bureaus. Burgum framed mining as a geopolitical necessity, stating the DOI is committed to "establishing our position as dominant in critical minerals, releasing the stranglehold that China has on critical minerals over the U.S. economy." He also argued that DOI's regulatory reforms will generate over \$20 billion in revenue, more than offsetting the department's operational costs.

### ***Major Takeaways:***

- Members spent a considerable portion of the hearing discussing DOI's approach to renewable energy, specifically offshore wind.
  - Ranking Member Pingree engaged in several exchanges with Burgum over the Total Energies settlement. In response, Burgum ardently defended the Total Energies settlement, contrasting actions with the efforts by the Biden administration to cancel pipelines without any sort of compensation.
  - The administration's general national security arguments against the deployment of offshore wind projects were heavily discussed with Pingree and other Democrats rejecting such arguments and pointing to the administration's court losses on the subject. Burgum continued to assert throughout the hearing that offshore wind creates radar interference that could blind U.S. defenses against threats such as low-flying drone swarms and autonomous undersea threats. He also suggested that Sweden had similarly cancelled offshore wind projects over national security concerns.
  - Rep. **Michael Cloud** (R-TX-27) validated the national security rationale for opposing offshore wind, alleging that wind turbines can create blind spots, produce false radar targets, reduce detection sensitivity, and complicate tracking of aircraft and missiles.
  - Rep. **Betty McCollum** (D-MN-04) requested that DOI provide Congress with more specifics on its national security arguments used to justify blocking projects, indicating that even with her role on the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee she has not had this raised as an issue by the Pentagon.
  - Rep. **Josh Harder** (D-CA-09) centered his questions around onshore renewable energy, citing the 18 GW of solar that have been cancelled or paused as a result of the administration's July 15, 2025 memo pausing onshore wind and solar permitting. He questioned the motivation of the memo, characterizing renewables as one of the more affordable forms of energy.
    - Burgum pushed back on the affordability of renewables and alleged that the energy sources are unreliable, citing Winter Storm Fern as a case study of renewables' inability to produce energy at peak demand.
    - Burgum also cited national security concerns with onshore renewables, pointing to China's pervasive role in renewable energy supply chains.
  - Burgum was generally critical of a one-size-fits-all approach to federal solar subsidies, arguing that solar production varies by latitude and climate, yet the

same subsidy is offered regardless of geography, leading to inefficient deployment of taxpayer dollars. Later in the hearing, he conceded that there was a positive use case to be made for solar – specifically rooftop solar – on rural and tribal homes that cannot access grid transmission.

- Other energy sources including geothermal, nuclear, and hydropower were also discussed in the hearing, oftentimes in a favorable light by the Secretary.
  - During an exchange with Ranking Member Pingree about the administration’s approach to renewable energy, Burgum spoke about how the administration supports certain forms of reliable, “baseload” energy. He stated, “In this administration, we support hydro, [a] great form of baseload. We support nuclear, which has been under attack in parts of our country. And we're doing great things to try to bring nuclear back. Geothermal represents a huge opportunity for this country.”
  - Later in the hearing, Burgum pointed to four nuclear energy-focused executive orders aimed at supporting nuclear energy; he implied that there are “billions of dollars [of] capital flowing back into small modular nuclear” as a result of the administration’s embrace of the sector.
- Permitting energy projects amid rising demand was also a topic of discussion.
  - When asked by Rep. Cloud about the department’s efforts to help ease permitting for energy projects, Burgum lamented that 95 percent of the interconnection queue was occupied by wind, solar, and battery storage projects, driven by federal subsidies rather than market fundamentals.
  - Burgum promoted DOI’s work, in coordination with the Department of Energy to curb “prematurely” retiring baseload energy sources.
  - He also applauded the investments being made by the nation’s hyperscalers to invest in energy infrastructure. At the same time, he promoted data center developers’ willingness to build energy projects behind the meter and follow through on commitments made via the White House Ratepayer Protection Pledge.
  - Rep. **Celeste Maloy** (R-UT-02) thanked Burgum for moving *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA) regulations into departmental handbooks. Burgum explained that this streamlining effort separates the actual legal requirements from “regulatory creep,” making it easier for projects to get permitted and survive litigation. At the same time, he suggested that these changes can help project “proponents” and “opponents” alike to understand the law.
- The department’s ongoing focus on resource development of mineral resources specifically was another topic of discussion in the hearing.
  - When asked by Rep. **Mark Amodei** (R-NM-02) to name his number one priority for Nevada, Burgum explicitly pointed to “the mining and mineral side.” He reiterated the national security framing and asserted that Nevada can play a huge role [...] in getting us back into the game.”
  - Rep. McCollum also discussed mining during the hearing through the lens of the Senate’s recent passage of a Congressional Review Act (CRA) resolution overturning a 2023 mineral withdrawal that protected the headwaters of the Boundary Waters. McCollum accused the administration of “weaponizing” the

- CRA process in order to “get a do-over” on public land orders, expressing concern that the *Federal Land Policy and Management Act* process is being bypassed to open public lands to mining.
- Further, McCollum requested more detail on the administration's national security justifications for the Boundary Waters action, alleging that the leases for the Boundary Waters belong to a "foreign-owned company" that will likely ship the extracted ore to China to be sold on the global market.
  - Staffing concerns were also raised by Members on both sides of the aisle over the course of the hearing.
    - Ranking Member DeLauro questioned Burgum on NPS staffing in particular, citing mass firings and buyouts in 2025. Burgum affirmed that DOI is not planning reductions in force or “RIFs” but is rather moving staff out of remote or headquarters roles and placing them directly into visitor-facing roles in the parks. When asked generally to provide detail on how many employees have left, been reinstated, or taken buyouts, Burgum committed to following up.
    - Republican Members raised more specific concerns with Chair Cole speaking of concerns on local NPS offices struggling to hire essential permanent staff and Rep. Amodei discussing affordable housing concerns for staff. Both Chair Simpson and Rep. **Jake Elzey** (R-TX-06) voiced concern with law enforcement staffing in Indian country.
  - Wildfire management concerns were also raised by Chair Simpson along with other Members of the Committee.
    - Simpson asked for an update on the consolidation of wildland fire activities. Burgum clarified it is a "unification" – not a consolidation – and characterized the effort as a fix for jurisdictional disputes that previously delayed emergency responses.
    - Rep. Amodei requested assurance that state and local fire chiefs would have a designated liaison within this new federal structure; Burgum confirmed.
    - When questioned by Rep. Harder about an unanswered letter sent to the Department regarding the Wildland Fire Service Plan, Burgum committed to following up.
  - Near the conclusion of the hearing, Rep. Amodei also shared his understanding that Nevada Bureau of Land Management Director **John Raby** would be leaving the role in the coming weeks. The Congressman requested that Burgum replace Raby “with somebody as good as him,” calling him a "problem solver" and “true ‘pro.’”