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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
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Opening Statement of
Chairman Doug Lamborn
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
On Thursday, February 27th at 2:00 p.m.
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Oversight Hearing on “Obama Administration Oversight: GAO Report – Interior Hiring and Retention Challenges.”

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today.

Today we will hear testimony from the Government Accountability Office on their most recent report examining the Department of the Interior’s efforts to retain and hire staff for the oil and gas programs at the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, and the Bureau of safety and Environmental Management. Programs that require highly trained scientists and technical expertise in the geoscience and engineering fields.

Today’s hearing is in many ways a continuation of our hearing yesterday on well-paying job opportunities in the Energy Sector for our nation’s veterans and continues to expose the tremendous opportunities in the energy sector.

Having the right staff with the appropriate experience and technical background is crucial for the management, regulation, and safety of the federal oil and gas programs at DOI and the Forest Service.

GAO first looked at the energy program staffing issues at BLM in 2005 and determined that the problems BLM experienced in the hiring and retention of qualified people coupled strained the agency’s ability to manage their responsibility for environmental protection in the oil and gas program. In January 2011, GAO added the Department of the Interior’s management of federal oil and natural gas resources to their list of programs at high risk of fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement.

GAO continues to monitor the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, and Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement regarding staffing challenges.

Two primary factors are at the root cause of these agencies staffing challenges: competition with the oil and gas industry, which pays 60 to 70 percent higher salaries than the

government; and, the length of the hiring process– in which time applicants have taken other jobs.

This is especially important for the hiring of recent graduates. It is hard to imagine a graduate with loans and offers from companies, someone who may want to do public service, will instead sit idly by while the Department waits months, upon months, to make hiring decisions.

Other factors impacting the agencies' ability to hire qualified people include the availability and cost of housing in areas where 'energy booms' are occurring, inclement weather, and lack of upward mobility in some positions.

Both Congress and the Office of Personnel Management – OPM - have taken steps over the last decade or more to address the 'Human Capital' problems experienced by many agencies in the federal government authorizing the use of incentives and bonuses to help with recruiting, retention, and relocation and OPM offering guidance and a template for possessing applications in a timely fashion.

Congress took further action to address the salary disparity in Fiscal Year 2012 and 2013 authorizing a 25 percent raise to the base salaries for Petroleum Engineers and geologists and geophysicist working in the Gulf of Mexico Region. However, for some locations people did not see a raise in their base salaries because it was not based on 'location adjusted' salaries but on the base salary.

We will hear today from GAO that Interior has not taken advantage of the various incentives authorized by Congress to improve their hiring and retention of critical staff needed for appropriate oversight of the federal oil and gas program. And this is really the biggest shame, clearly the Department of Interior is not using all available tools to correct their problem with hiring and retention of staff to manage and oversee oil and natural gas activities. It appears this simply is not a priority for the Department of Interior and the Obama Administration.

I hope today's hearing will help us get some of these answers and an understanding of what the Department should be doing to ensure that highly skilled workers are on the job protecting America's interests.

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