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Documents Requested on Whether Interior Department and IG are Actively Pursuing Ethics Investigations

WASHINGTON, D.C. – House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (WA-04) today [sent a letter](#) to Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar seeking further information on the operations and activities of the Department's Ethics Office.

For the past year, the Committee has conducted oversight of how political appointees and senior career officials within the Department are complying with federal ethics and conflict of interest laws. Committee staff have been told by Department officials that only eight ethics cases have been referred to the Office of the Inspector General (IG) since January 2009 - only one of those cases involved a senior career official and none involved a political appointee.

A recently released Committee staff report, "[Holding the Interior Watchdog Accountable](#)," also highlighted several examples where the IG, under the direction of Deputy Inspector General Mary Kendall, did not actively investigate certain Department programs and allegations of misconduct and mismanagement by Obama Administration officials.

"Several recent news articles, however, have raised serious questions about whether the Department and the IG are, in fact, aggressively pursuing allegations of wrongdoing and whether current and former senior Obama Administration officials are being held accountable for complying with federal ethics and conflict of interest laws," **wrote Chairman Hastings in the letter.**

Specific examples mentioned in the letter include:

- The [Los Angeles Times](#) reported on Counselor to the Secretary Steve Black's romantic relationship with a lobbyist for a renewable energy developing several solar projects on Federal lands. Although Mr. Black was apparently told to recuse himself from certain matters, it appears that no ethics review or evaluations were conducted by the IG to determine whether a violation of federal ethics and conflict of interest laws occurred with his work on renewable energy issues for the Department. On March 13, the Department gave final approval to one of the company's projects.
- As reported by the [Las-Vegas Review Journal](#), a consulting firm co-owned by the former Director of BLM Bob Abbey stands to gain \$528,000 in fees for helping to

arrange the sale of federal land from BLM to a private developer on behalf of the city of Henderson, NV. The IG is reviewing whether to launch a formal investigation.

- Assistant Secretary for Insular Affairs Tony Babauta recently resigned his Presidential appointment amid news stories that he had been placed on administrative leave pending an investigation by the IG into questions about his travel and role in awarding grants.

[Click here](#) to read the full letter and to see the specific list of documents requested.

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