



Fox News Special Report: House panel clears way for administration subpoenas on drilling, coal reg probes



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[House panel clears way for administration subpoenas on drilling, coal reg probes](#)

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A House Committee voted Wednesday to clear the way to subpoena the Obama administration over two separate probes -- one concerning allegations dating back to the BP spill that it misrepresented a report on the temporary offshore drilling ban.

The 23-17 vote along party lines allows GOP Rep. Doc Hastings, chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, to issue the subpoenas, which will go to such agencies as the Interior Department and the Environmental Protection Agency.

One probe concerns officials rewriting coal-production regulations. The other investigation

centers on an administration report on oil production following the April 2010 explosion of the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig off the Louisiana coast.

A panel of experts said it recommended that drilling in the Gulf resume. However, the final report from Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to President Obama called for a six-month moratorium and was edited to suggest the panel's support of that recommendation.

Salazar apologized in June 2010, saying he and the president made the decision to impose the moratorium.

House Democrats said Wednesday the change was a result of hectic deadline editing by multiple authors.

But Rep. Louie Gohmert, R-Texas, said the incident was tantamount to "fraud."

On the second issue, Republicans are charging the Obama administration tried to squelch a report that showed a proposed regulation on coal mining would destroy jobs. Republicans claimed Wednesday that political appointees tried to get the firm that did the study to change its numbers -- and told them not to release their estimate of job losses to anyone. The Obama administration has contested these claims.

Going forward, GOP members want subpoena power to obtain documents and audio recordings that could make clear what happened, in both cases.

Hastings said before the hearing that the Interior Department "has not met a single deadline for producing all of the requested information and continues to withhold the vast majority of requested materials."

"When I became chairman, I made clear that one of my priorities would be oversight of the administration," said Hastings, R-Wash. "Both investigations have been ongoing for over a year."

He said the requested information includes more than 30 hours of digital audio recordings of meetings and conversations between the agency and contractors regarding the rewriting of the coal production regulation, specifically regarding stream-buffer zones.

"If there's nothing to hide, then why are these recordings being withheld," Hastings asked at the hearing.

In a statement given to Fox News Wednesday night, the Department of the Interior denies they have not cooperated with the two probes, saying they have numerous times testified and produced documents to comply with the Committee's legitimate oversight interests. In the case of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, they say Sec. Salazar set stronger standards for safety soon after the incident, and they were quickly adopted by the industry.

"This investigation continues to spend taxpayer resources to re-litigate an issue that was resolved two years ago, and that has thoroughly been reviewed by the Department's Inspector General," the statement said. "The American people would be best served by

passage of the legislative changes we've recommended to further enhance offshore oil and gas enforcement and safety."

In the case of coal-production regulations, the Interior Department says the legislation being discussed has not yet even been proposed.

"The expense of significant resources on premature oversight threatens to jeopardize the Executive Branch's ongoing deliberations," the statement said. "Once we do put forward a proposed rule to better protect communities and water supplies from the adverse impacts of surface coal mining, we will provide ample opportunity for the public, industry, stakeholders, Congress, and others to provide input that will help us develop a balanced and responsible rule."

Democrats on the committee objected to the approval of the subpoena request.

"The subpoenas are a blank check for an investigation that has been shooting blanks," said Rep. Markey, D-Mass. "Just because (the committee) discusses streams and rivers doesn't mean we should go on a fishing expedition."

Fox News' Jim Angle contributed to this report.

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