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[Interior inspector defends impartiality in report probe](#)

By: Gregory Korte

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When questions came up about how the White House edited an Interior Department report to justify a moratorium on offshore drilling, acting Inspector General Mary Kendall investigated and reported back to Congress only that the report "could have been more clearly worded."

Now documents released to a congressional committee show that Kendall attended meetings at which department officials reviewed drafts of the very same report she later was responsible for investigating.

House Natural Resources Chairman Doc Hastings, R-Wash., already critical of the quality of the investigation, said the new documents "raise serious doubts about the impartiality and independence of the IG investigation into the drilling moratorium report." He wants Kendall to explain her earlier testimony to Congress that she had no involvement in the report.

Kendall told USA TODAY she did attend the meetings after the Deepwater Horizon spill in April 2010, but stands by her testimony.

"I was an active listener. I was not an active participant in these meetings," she said. "I'm a lawyer; I'm not a deep-water engineer. I needed to learn as much about the operations just to get my head around the issues. My participation was educational only, for my own edification."

The episode comes as Congress probes whether acting inspectors general — those filling the duties of the job without being nominated and confirmed by the Senate — have the

necessary independence.

Kendall has been an acting inspector general for more than three years, after predecessor Earl Devaney took what was supposed to be a short-term job overseeing stimulus spending. Devaney retired last year, officially freeing up the Interior position. President Obama hasn't nominated a successor.

"It raises the potential for conflict, especially if she would put her name in for IG," said Jake Wiens, a former investigator for the Project on Government Oversight who testified to Congress this month on inspector general vacancies. "Her job prospects are captive to the goodwill of the administration. If she releases something that makes political waves, they may not appoint her."

Kendall acknowledged her interest in the job, but defended her independence. She said her relationship with the department was "productive" but with a "healthy tension."

Two days before Obama announced the moratorium, Interior Department schedules show that Kendall was a "required invitee" to a meeting to discuss peer review of the report — the same peer review that would later become the subject of her investigation.

The morning after the report was released, Kendall exchanged e-mails with Steve Black, counselor to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar. She called the work that went into the report "enormously impressive."

"Thanks for your kind words, Mary, and for your participation in so many of the meetings and interviews leading up to this report," Black replied.

Shortly afterward, some of the experts consulted for the report complained that the report was edited by the White House to falsely suggest they supported a drilling moratorium, and Congress asked Kendall to investigate

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House Natural Resources Committee Press Office
Contact: [Spencer Pederson](#), [Crystal Feldman](#) or [Jill Strait](#)
202-226-9019

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