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OVERSIGHT: Documents Sought from White House on Decision to Impose Offshore Drilling Moratorium in Gulf

Letter to Chief of Staff Lew Seeks Interviews, Emails, and Drafts on Report Edited to Falsely State Obama Drilling Moratorium Supported by Experts

WASHINGTON, D.C. – House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings today sent a [letter](#) to White House Chief of Staff Jacob Lew requesting documents and interviews regarding White House officials' role in the late-night editing of the Interior Department's Drilling Moratorium Report to make it appear as though the moratorium in the Gulf of Mexico was supported by a panel of engineering experts when it was not. [Click here](#) to read the full letter.

For over two years, Republicans on the Natural Resources Committee have been conducting an extensive [investigation](#) into how and why edits were made to the report. While Secretary Salazar and other Interior Department officials have failed to fully comply with a subpoena for documents, the Committee's investigation has confirmed that political appointees at the White House and the Department were responsible for altering the Drilling Moratorium Report.

"The moratorium decision – which cost thousands of jobs and led to decreased oil and gas production in the Gulf of Mexico – apparently was made by political appointees in the Obama Administration without any scientific, technical, economic, or safety review to ensure that it would in fact increase safety of offshore drilling," wrote Chairman Hastings. "The fact that President Obama supported the moratorium decision is well known. Little known and less understood is the role played by White House political staff in analyzing and recommending the moratorium as a way to improve safety in offshore drilling in the first place and in developing and editing the Drilling Moratorium Report to misstate the peer reviewers' role...It is expected that current and former White House officials would be in a unique position, based on their involvement in the moratorium decision and developing and editing the Drilling Moratorium Report, to answer these questions."

An investigation by the Department of the Interior's Office of Inspector General (IG) confirmed that White House officials were responsible for editing the report's Executive Summary, but the IG was unable to independently verify whether the authors intended to mislead the public. It now appears, based on [information](#) obtained by the Committee, that the IG's lead investigators were unable, or directed not, to obtain all documents and information they felt necessary to pursue the investigation, including interviews with key White House officials.

Documents reviewed and obtained by the Committee suggest that former White House staffer Joe Aldy and current White House staffers Heather Zichal and Dan Utech were involved in developing the Drilling Moratorium Report and may have knowledge about how the report was edited. None of these three were interviewed by the IG during the course of its investigation.

Last month, the Committee sent a [letter](#) to Aldy seeking a transcribed interview. A date for that interview still has yet to be set. In today's letter, Chairman Hastings requests a transcribed interview with Zichal and Utech.

Today's [letter](#) also requests unredacted copies of the following documents by October 26, 2012:

- 1) All documents related to any request by the Department of the Interior, including the Office of Inspector General, to interview or obtain documents from any White House officials, including Carol Browner, Heather Zichal, and Joe Aldy, related to the IG's investigation of the drilling moratorium report.
- 2) All emails and other documents discussing or otherwise concerning edits to the Drilling Moratorium Report, including drafts of the report, changes to the peer review language, or responses to the peer reviewers' complaints, created, sent, or received by Carol Browner, Heather Zichal, Joe Aldy, and Dan Utech.
- 3) All documents, including calendar entries, agendas, minutes, or notes, of any meetings, concerning the accuracy of Ms. Kendall's Congressional testimony, her handling of the moratorium investigation, and her suitability for the permanent Inspector General position.

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