



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Bruce Westerman  
Chairman, Committee on  
Natural Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Westerman:

This responds on behalf of Secretary Haaland and Director Young to your February 15, 2024, letter, cosigned by a number of members of the House Natural Resources Committee (Committee), regarding the Department of the Interior's (Department) responses to questions submitted to Departmental witnesses following their appearances at hearings before the Committee.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to provide the Administration's views on issues pending before Congress and does so regularly for both chambers when requested. As your letter noted, the Committee is one of the most active in Congress when it comes to requesting Administration witnesses, and the Department works diligently to accommodate those requests whenever possible.

In 2023 alone, the Department provided witnesses to testify at 41 Committee hearings and provided testimony without an in-person witness in an additional seven hearings, presenting views on approximately 94 individual bills. In just the first two months of 2024, the Department has already provided witnesses to testify at six hearings and has provided testimony without an in-person witness at two additional hearings, presenting views on 10 individual bills. In addition to official Committee hearings, the Department and its bureaus regularly provide briefings to Committee staff on a wide variety of topics, and, on a near daily basis, respond to correspondence, oversight requests, requests for technical assistance, and requests for other information from the Committee and individual Members of Congress.

Responding to the Committee's formal questions submitted following hearings (also known as questions for the record or QFRs) is an important part of the process in which the Department accommodates and engages with Congress and the Committee. The Department's Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCL) leads that process, working in close coordination with numerous staff from the various bureaus and offices of the Department. OCL conducts this process, which involves both intra-Departmental review and inter-agency review in accordance with Office of Management and Budget Circular A-19, according to the Department's long-standing practices that have existed across Administrations of both political parties, and regardless of which party is in the majority of any particular chamber of Congress.

Contrary to the assertions in your letter, following the numerous hearings that the Committee has held at which the Department has provided a testimony at the Committee's request, OCL has worked diligently to prepare and clear responses to Committee members' QFRs. OMB has also worked diligently to circulate and provide inter-agency feedback on all responses it has received from the Department through the Circular A-19 process, along with the high volume of similar work that OMB does with the various other agencies of the federal government. To ensure the Department's responses to the Committee's questions are accurate and consistent with Administration policy and applicable law, this effort involves coordination among teams of dedicated public servants at the Department and across the federal government, often including subject matter experts at the regional and field levels, the same individuals who carry out the core functions and daily delivery of services to implement the critical mission of the Department on behalf of the American public.

Finally, I would note that your letter included at least one inaccuracy – the attachment stated that responses to QFRs following a May 25, 2023, hearing before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations had not yet been transmitted. In fact, the hearing identified was actually held on July 27, 2023, and responses to the questions submitted were transmitted to your Committee on December 29, 2023. Since receipt of your letter, the Department has transmitted an additional six sets of QFRs to the Committee.

The Department appreciates the Committee's interest in this topic and will continue to endeavor to make timely responses to QFRs from Committee hearings a priority, along with appearing at and providing testimony for Committee hearings, responding as appropriate to other Committee requests, all while carrying out the Department's mission and statutory responsibilities on behalf of the American people as it has done across many Congresses. Should you have any questions, please contact Paniz Rezaeerod, Deputy Director for the House, at (202) 538-2105 or [paniz\\_rezaeerod@ios.doi.gov](mailto:paniz_rezaeerod@ios.doi.gov).

Sincerely,

Andrew Wallace  
Director, Office of Congressional  
and Legislative Affairs