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Subject: Key Dems press Zinke for info on reg review task force
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REGULATIONS

Key Dems press Zinke for info on reg review task force

*Arianna Skibell, E&E News reporter
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Key House Democrats are pushing back at recent Department of the Interior efforts to roll back regulations and are questioning the role of acting Deputy Secretary of the Interior James Cason.

House Natural Resource Committee ranking member Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz) and Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations ranking member Donald McEachin (D-Va) yesterday sent a letter to Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke demanding additional information on a newly established regulatory task force.

President Trump's February executive order on regulations requires agencies to establish a panel to identify rules for modification or repeal.

The lawmakers noted that the members of the task force, first reported by E&E News, include five political "beachhead" employees and one career staffer but no Senate-confirmed personnel or staff with clear technical expertise in land management, wildlife management, environmental protection or safety regulation.

They added that there is no information "about how this task force will operate, where it fits in the regulatory review process created by SO 3349, whether any of its activities or decisions will be transparent and be made known to the public, whether it will accept public comments, or any other logistical detail."

They demanded Zinke release more information about how the task force plans to operate, while emphasizing that the task force should not operate in the dark.

"The American people deserve to know why certain regulations are or are not being considered for repeal or modification, how decisions to repeal or modify regulations are being made, and the true health, safety, environmental, and economic impacts of making changes to those regulations," they wrote.

Cason's review authority

In a separate letter, the lawmakers raised questions about an April 12 memo Zinke sent to department secretaries directing them to ensure all bureau heads and office directors report to the acting deputy secretary on all "proposed decisions" that have "nationwide, regional, or statewide impacts."

The memo also said that decisions should not be made until the acting deputy secretary has "reviewed the report and provided clearance."

"While the memo purports to be in part for the purpose of allowing the Acting Deputy Secretary to learn more about how Departmental decisions are made, the person currently filling the role of Acting Deputy Secretary, Mr. James Cason, served as Associate Deputy Secretary for the Department of the Interior from 2001 through 2009, and would be expected to already have a good understanding about Departmental processes," yesterday's letter pointed out.

Grijalva and McEachin asked Zinke to disclose any guidance issued to Interior agencies explaining the extent of Cason's review authority. They also asked what authority Cason has over grants and regulatory decisions, and for further clarification over the terms "nationwide, regional, or statewide impacts."

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