



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

May 21, 2019

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey:

On May 15, 2019, the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee considered the fiscal year (FY) 2020 Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. We are strongly opposed to the budgetary framework that underlies this and other appropriations bills being considered by the Appropriations Committee. In advance of Full Committee consideration of this bill, I would like to take this opportunity to share both these overall concerns as well as specific concerns related to this bill.

The Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill is being considered under House Democrats' budget framework, which would raise the discretionary spending caps by more than \$350 billion in FYs 2020 and 2021 and does not reflect a House-passed budget resolution or a bipartisan, bicameral agreement. This would put the Federal Government on track to add nearly \$2 trillion to deficits over 10 years, while the national debt is already above \$22 trillion and rising.

In addition, the House Democrats' framework continues the misguided notion that increases to defense spending must be matched or exceeded by increases to non-defense spending. The bills under consideration actually provide more than twice as much additional funding in FY 2020 for non-defense than for defense programs, relative to FY 2019 levels. Investing in our national security remains a key Administration priority, but ensuring our defense does not require additional non-defense discretionary funding.

Excessive deficits continue to threaten the Nation's progress, and without action to restore the proper size and role of Government, deficits will remain over a trillion dollars per year for the foreseeable future. The President's FY 2020 Budget provides the Congress with a clear roadmap for bringing Federal spending under control. It proposes more spending reductions than any other administration has proposed in history, while providing necessary funding for defense, national security, and other critical needs. Importantly, the Budget protects these key priorities while adhering to the discretionary spending caps in current law. The Congress must do the same.

Overall, according to information provided in the Subcommittee press release, the bill provides \$37.3 billion, \$7.2 billion or nearly 24 percent above the FY 2020 Budget request and \$1.7 billion above the FY 2019 enacted level.

The Administration appreciates that the Subcommittee bill includes funding for critical priorities, including a total of \$5.2 billion for Wildland Fire costs at both the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the Forest Service within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), as well as the inclusion of resources to support expanded energy development on public lands and offshore waters within DOI, and the \$320 million provided in support of National Park Service construction within DOI to help address deferred maintenance.

However, the bill includes funding that the Administration believes is not in line with the overall effort to control non-defense spending reflected in the FY 2020 Budget request or underfunds key investments in critical areas supported in the FY 2020 Budget request, including:

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Operating Programs. In total, the bill provides an estimated \$3.4 billion for EPA's Environmental Program Management and Science and Technology accounts, approximately \$1 billion more than the FY 2020 Budget request and \$105 million over the FY 2019 enacted level. The FY 2020 Budget request proposed to focus funding on EPA's core activities of protecting air, land, and water resources, and ensuring the safety of chemicals to make the Agency a better steward of taxpayer dollars. The bill however, provides significant unrequested funding for additional activities and programs that go beyond EPA's core statutory requirements, extramural research and development activities, and local environmental restoration projects.
- Environmental Grants. The bill provides \$4.6 billion for EPA's State and Tribal Assistance Grant account, an increase of more than \$2 billion over the FY 2020 Budget request and \$511 million over the FY 2019 enacted level. Within this account, the bill provides significant unrequested funding, including support for categorical grants, and activities that may go beyond core statutory mandates.
- DOI Topline. While the Administration appreciates the bill's support for priority DOI programs, it also provides increased funding in excess of the FY 2020 Budget request across a number DOI program areas. These include land management operations, tribal programs, and U.S. Geological Survey research. In total, the bill provides an estimated \$13.8 billion for DOI, \$2.4 billion more than the FY 2020 Budget request.
- DOI Reorganization. The bill does not include requested funds for reorganization of DOI. The \$28 million requested in the FY 2020 Budget for the next phase of implementation is critical for DOI to be able to align its bureaus and offices to be more efficient and responsive to the public. The Administration strongly opposes efforts to block these organizational reforms.
- USDA Forest Service Topline. The Administration appreciates the bill's support for priority Forest Service programs and the support in eliminating cost pools; however, the bill provides an estimated \$5.7 billion for the Forest Service, nearly \$550 million more than requested in the FY 2020 Budget.

- Federal Land Acquisition. The bill provides \$244 million for land acquisition at DOI and USDA, an increase of \$216 million above the FY 2020 Budget request, excluding rescissions. DOI and USDA have a maintenance backlog exceeding \$18 billion, so acquiring new lands is a low priority.
- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The Administration is disappointed that the bill does not eliminate Federal funding for NEA and NEH. The FY 2020 Budget request proposed an orderly phase-out of Federal funding for these agencies as the Administration does not consider their activities to be core Federal responsibilities.
- Office of Special Trustee for American Indians (OST) within DOI. The Administration appreciates support in the bill for creating an autonomous Bureau of Indian Education, but has concerns with reductions in OST funding. These reductions could jeopardize efforts to further reforms in managing tribal trust assets.

The bill also includes a number of objectionable language provisions, including section 117, which would prohibit DOI from using funds for pre-leasing and other activities in certain areas of the Outer Continental Shelf. The Administration strongly opposes this attempt to block authorized activities that promote America's energy security.

In addition, section 118 prohibits DOI from using funds to conduct a lease sale in the Coastal Plain (1002 area) of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, unless that sale meets arbitrary national minimum bid criteria. This restriction imposes unnecessary and unrealistic restrictions on leasing in an area that the Congress has already authorized.

As the Committee takes up the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, the Administration looks forward to working with you to address these concerns.

Sincerely,



Russell T. Vought
Acting Director

cc: The Honorable Betty McCollum
The Honorable David Joyce

Identical Letter Sent to the Honorable Kay Granger