



## INTERIOR: Environmental group opposes IG nominee

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A watchdog group for public employees is opposing President Obama's pick for inspector general at the Department of the Interior.

In a [letter](#) sent today to Sens. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), chairwoman and ranking member, respectively, of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, **Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility** said Mary Kendall -- a deputy Interior IG who has held the top job on an acting basis since 2009 -- is not qualified to be permanent IG.

"I am writing to register our opposition to the confirmation of Mary L. Kendall to serve as the Inspector General (IG) at the Department of Interior," PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch said in the letter.

"In working on behalf of Interior Department employees, including both current and former employees of the IG during her tenure there, PEER has concluded that Ms. Kendall lacks the vision, integrity, and leadership skills to be an effective IG."

Ruch then cites several cases that the Interior IG has investigated or refused to investigate in the past, often causing controversy after Kendall's handling of the cases came under scrutiny.

The watchdog group says Kendall's office has targeted low-level staff but not senior managers, including political appointees. Ruch cites a 2013 report by the House Natural Resources Committee's Republican staff that blasted Kendall for being too cooperative with Interior management ([E&ENews PM](#), Feb. 21, 2013).

PEER also questions the Interior IG's transparency under Kendall, saying its Freedom of Information of Act requests have been blunted by the office. It notes a [Greenwire](#) report that found the Interior IG closed 457 cases in 2013 but released public reports for only three of those investigations ([Greenwire](#), Oct. 14, 2014).

Ruch in his letter also says the IG's public reports often focus on "relatively petty personnel matters" instead of more serious issues.

He references an IG investigation into scientists who drafted a 2006 paper linking polar bear deaths to melting ice caps. One of those scientists was later awarded \$100,000 by Interior to settle his whistleblower complaint ([Greenwire](#), Dec. 4, 2013).

Stephen Hardgrove, chief of staff for the Interior IG office, questioned the charges in PEER's letter made against Kendall and noted the watchdog group didn't mention the changes she has made at the organization.

"We have not had an opportunity to closely review PEER's letter to Senators Murkowski and Cantwell; however, the initial review detects a number of inaccuracies. I also see that the allegations against Mary Kendall are dated, with most occurring during the transition period from the previous inspector general, and do not accurately reflect the leadership and organizational change she has made over the past several years," Hardgrove said.

Kendall's nomination is scheduled to be considered Tuesday by the Senate Energy panel. The deputy Interior IG has already been making the rounds on Capitol Hill, meeting with several senators to make the case for her confirmation ([E&E Daily](#), Oct. 2).

Kendall has already faced some opposition in the Senate to her taking on the permanent IG job. Soon after Obama nominated her for the position in June, Sen. David Vitter (R-La.) demanded that the White House provide a new nominee to be Interior's watchdog ([Greenwire](#), June 12).

