

Secretary Gale A. Norton  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C. Street N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

May 6, 2002

Dear Secretary Norton,

PEER is greatly disturbed by a scheduled May 7, closed-door meeting between Interior officials and the Independent Petroleum Association of the Mountain States. The meeting involves top members of your staff - Deputy Interior Secretary Steven Griles, Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Rebecca Watson, and BLM Director Kathleen Clarke.

According to an E-mail notice IPAMS sent to its membership, the meeting is an opportunity for IPAMS members to bring up "specific concerns about BLM Field Offices and personnel." In other words, oil officials will be complaining about BLM employees whose work has displeased certain industry executives. By appearing at this May 7 IPAMS forum, your Department is effectively encouraging industry groups to put together hit lists of responsible employees they would like to see transferred, demoted, terminated or otherwise removed.

In light of the BLM's recent forced transfers of high-level BLM officers after consultations from industry organizations, the message sent by this latest meeting only reinforces the impression that these organizations unduly influence, if not dictate, personnel decisions within the Department of Interior.

In January, BLM reassigned California Desert District Manager Tim Salt to a desk job in Washington after a month-long campaign by cattle ranchers and off-road vehicle enthusiasts. The industry groups targeted Salt after he helped BLM settle a lawsuit involving endangered species in the California desert. Two months later, Mr. Griles asked BLM Idaho Director Martha Hahn to resign her post at the request of Owyhee County cattle ranchers.

It is precisely because the Department of Interior has done little to correct the impression these and other personnel actions were politically motivated that the petroleum industry feels emboldened enough to publicly advertise in its efforts to weed out regulators who enforce environmental laws with integrity.

According to a report in the Denver Post of May 6 (attached), Mr. Griles says that "he won't entertain complaints about personnel... ." If that sentiment accurately reflects your Department's policy on these matters, it would be most appropriate to commit them to writing and communicate them to all BLM officials. Conversely, failure to relay those assurances to your staff in a concrete way only adds power to the suggestion that industry is exercising direct influence over personnel decisions.

I look forward to hearing how you decide to address this matter.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Ruch  
Executive Director

Cc. Deputy Interior Secretary Steven Griles, Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals  
Rebecca Watson BLM Director Kathleen Clarke.