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Committee criticizes Interior Department for 'culture of corruption'

Witnesses say violations are not the norm

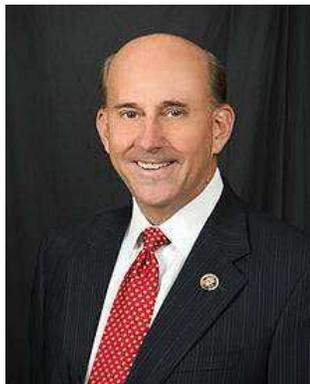


Photo by:
Gohmert

By Kate Magill
Herald Staff Writer

WASHINGTON – The [House Committee on Natural Resources](#) examined what it dubbed a “culture of corruption” in the Department of Interior at an oversight hearing this week.

Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations chairman Louie Gohmert, R-Texas, led the Tuesday hearing, which highlighted recent incidents of unethical conduct in multiple aspects of the department. It was the second hearing in as many weeks targeting the Interior Department.

“This committee has time and again received reports about employees at the Department of the Interior acting in an unethical manner, including astounding violations by high ranking officials in the [National Park Service](#) and the [Bureau of Indian Affairs](#),” Gohmert said in his opening statement.

The behavior that Gohmert referred to includes a book project by NPS director Jonathan Jarvis that violated ethical standards. Jarvis was investigated and reprimanded by the department’s Solicitor of the General Law after staff learned of the project in June 2015.

Jarvis was investigated for lying to Interior Secretary Sally Jewell about how the project began. Jarvis had told Jewell that he had been contacted by publisher Eastern National to write the book, when in fact he had approached the company, according to the report.

Jarvis did instruct the publishing firm to donate any royalties he would receive from the book go to the National Park Foundation, which is a nonprofit that raises money for NPS.

When asked during the investigation if he acknowledged any wrongdoing, Jarvis said that he knew he would “probably get in trouble,” by not asking the department for permission before publishing the book, but did so in an effort not to have the book edited.

Despite harsh criticism of the department from Gohmert, committee member Wm. Lacy Clay, D-Missouri, disagreed with the use of the phrase “culture of corruption,” saying that under the current administration, the department has acted for the most part in an ethical manner.

“This hearing seems to be the latest in a growing list of attempts by this subcommittee to do little more than attack this administration,” Clay said.

Witnesses for the hearing included Deputy Solicitor for General Law at the Department of Interior Edward Keable, and Deputy Inspector General for the department Mary Kendall.

Kendall acknowledged the wrongdoing of the directors of the National Park Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but maintained that such violations are not the norm in the department.

“Unfortunately misconduct by the few generates great notoriety and casts a shadow on the entire department,” Kendall said.

The committee held the first oversight hearing last week to examine a lack of transparency in the department. The hearings are a part of a wave of criticism from the committee against the department following incidents such as the Gold King Mine spill.

Kate Magill is a student at American University in Washington, D.C., and an intern with The Durango Herald.
