

Chairman Towns Wants More Information on Problems with Diversity Hiring at the Interior Department

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Recent Equal Employment Opportunity Commission report raises serious concerns about the Fish and Wildlife Service's Equal Employment Opportunity program

WASHINGTON – Chairman Edolphus “Ed” Towns (D-NY) is asking Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar to provide the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform with details regarding employment discrimination within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A recent report from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) highlighted inadequacy in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) program and violations of federal regulations.

In response to these developments, Chairman Towns wrote to Secretary Salazar to request information on diversity employment and hiring practices within the Department of the Interior. In his letter, Chairman Towns cited a recent discrimination case in which a supervisor in the Department called African-American subordinates “monkeys” and improperly interfered with the selection process for a job sought by a black man.

“I am extremely disappointed to hear of this behavior by a manager at Interior, and I am further

troubled by the claims that the admitted behavior of this manager has not been disciplined in any way," said Chairman Towns. "However, my most immediate concern is the potential consequences that may result if organizational changes do not swiftly take place."

In the letter to Secretary Salazar, Chairman Towns requested various records related to the Department of the Interior's compliance with equal opportunity regulations, as well as a statistical breakdown of the race and ethnicity of Interior employees and senior management over the past five years. Chairman Towns also requested that Secretary Salazar provide detailed descriptions of the structure of the EEO program within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services and an explanation of the steps being taken by the Department to address the problems found in the EEOC report.

Chairman Towns added, "I am encouraged to learn that you have recently appointed John Burden to the position of chief diversity officer, and issued a strong statement to your employees highlighting principles of 'inclusion, acceptance and accountability...and zero tolerance for discrimination.' It is important that these laudable principles translate into corrective action."

The Secretary has been asked to respond and provide the requested information to the Committee by Monday, October 4, 2010.

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Letter to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar