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Comptroller General
of the United States

June 3, 2026

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The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Priority Open Recommendations: Department of the Interior

Dear Secretary Burgum:

The purpose of this letter is to call your personal attention to two areas where open recommendations to the Department of the Interior should be given high priority.

In January 2026, we reported that, on a government-wide basis, 77 percent of our recommendations made 5 years ago were implemented.¹ Interior’s recommendation implementation rate was 52 percent. As of May 2026, Interior has 137 open recommendations, including 14 priority recommendations.² Since our May 2025 letter, Interior implemented one priority recommendation.³ Fully implementing the remaining open priority recommendations could significantly improve Interior’s operations.

We are highlighting the following areas that warrant your timely and focused attention:

- **Improving oversight of oil and gas activities.** Effectively overseeing oil and gas production and managing related risks is critical for ensuring the public receives a fair return for resources extracted from federal lands and waters. However, Interior faces challenges related to the data systems that support the collection, accounting, and verification of revenues—including royalties paid by companies—from oil and gas production at federal lease sites. Therefore, [we recommended](#) that Interior improve data sharing across its bureaus, for example by eliminating manual processes and improving its ability to electronically accept key oversight data. Addressing this recommendation would improve

¹GAO, *Performance and Accountability Report, Fiscal Year 2025*, [GAO-26-900644](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 29, 2026).

²GAO considers a recommendation to be a priority if when implemented, it may significantly improve government operations, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or making progress toward addressing a high-risk or duplication issue.

³GAO, *Priority Open Recommendations: Department of the Interior*, [GAO-25-108096](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 9, 2025). In that letter, we identified 14 priority recommendations. Since then, in addition to the one that was implemented, the priority status was removed from one recommendation, and we added two new priority recommendations.

Interior's ability to oversee oil and gas development, which provides billions of dollars in revenue to the federal government and states.

- **Conducting strategic workforce planning and oversight.** Strategic workforce planning is essential for programs to achieve their goals. We have highlighted the need for Interior to improve its workforce planning and staff development for several years. For example, [we recommended](#) that Indian Affairs identify skills, knowledge, and competency gaps in mission-critical occupations. Doing so could help Interior develop strategies to close skill gaps and better understand the resources it needs to improve its overall capacity and fulfill its trust responsibilities, such as managing trust funds and providing services to beneficiaries.

Both of these areas—[management of federal oil and gas reserves](#) and [strategic human capital management](#)—are also included on GAO's [High Risk List](#).⁴ Other government-wide high-risk areas have direct implications for Interior and its operations, including [managing federal real property](#). We also identified actions Interior should take to reduce fragmentation, overlap, and duplication. For example, [we reported](#) that Interior should direct its Chief Information Officer to strengthen IT leadership and oversight by implementing leading practices in executive-level IT governance for major technology investments. More information on our [Duplication and Cost Savings](#) work can be found on the GAO website.

A comprehensive list of open recommendations, including new priority recommendations, and information about their status can be found on the GAO website at [Recommendations Database | U.S. GAO](#). Copies of this letter are being sent to the appropriate congressional committees.⁵ This letter will also be available at [Priority Recommendations | U.S. GAO](#).

⁴This list identifies government operations with greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, [GAO-25-107743](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 25, 2025).

⁵We also help Congress identify congressional oversight actions that can help agencies implement priority recommendations, such as incorporating them into legislation. James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263, § 7211(a)(2), 136 Stat. 2395, 3668 (2022) (codified at 31 U.S.C. § 719 note). Congress can also use its budget, appropriations, and oversight processes to incentivize executive branch agencies to act on our recommendations and monitor their progress. For example, Congress can hold hearings focused on agencies' progress in implementing priority recommendations, withhold funds when appropriate, or take other actions to provide incentives for agencies to act.

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss how to address our open recommendations, as we pursue the shared goal of working to increase efficiency and effectiveness of government programs and spending. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Allison Bawden, Managing Director, Natural Resources and Environment Team at BawdenA@gao.gov. Contact points for our offices of Congressional Relations and Media Relations may be found on the last page of this letter. Thank you for your personal attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,

//SIGNED//

Orice Williams Brown
Acting Comptroller General
of the United States