Statement for the Record
U.S. Department of the Interior

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Legislative Hearing on

S. 4787, Free to Exit Administrative Tribunals (FEAT) Act
S. 5101, Glenwood Hot Springs Protection Act
H.R. 1682, BELO's Act

September 16, 2026

S. 4787, Free to Exit Administrative Tribunals (FEAT) Act

The Department's Office of Hearings and Appeals (OHA) exercises the delegated authority of the Secretary of the Interior to conduct hearings and decide appeals of decisions of the Department's bureaus and offices. The Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) and the Departmental Case Hearings Division (DCHD) impartially resolve disputes about public lands, natural resources, and select Tribal cases. DCHD handles the initial hearings for cases covered by the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), and its decisions can be appealed to the IBLA. The IBLA is an appellate review body within OHA and is separate from the bureaus and offices.

S. 4787 would authorize a covered party to remove covered actions before the IBLA or DCHD to a district court of the United States within 60 days after the proceeding is initiated if the action involves conduct by the party that requires Department approval; or a sanction or civil penalty imposed on that party by the Department. The bill further directs that judicial review of such decisions will be de novo.

The Department supports the goals of S. 4787 to expedite the resolution of disputes regarding public lands, natural resources, and certain Tribal issues, but would like to work with the Sponsor and the Committee to ensure that the bill would achieve the intended results. The Department also notes that the Bureau of Land Management has proposed a revision of its grazing regulations, including conforming changes to the regulations governing administrative appeals of BLM grazing decisions to OHA's DCHD. Under the direction of the Trump Administration, OHA, including IBLA and DCHD, is focused on streamlining and modernizing the appeal process while maintaining necessary flexibility in adjudication and resolving all appeals.

S. 5101, Glenwood Hot Springs Protection Act

S. 5101, the Glenwood Hot Springs Protection Act, would prohibit the Secretary of the Interior from processing or approving any application to expand existing mineral operations at the Mid-Continent Quarry in Garfield County near Glenwood Springs, Colorado. The bill would prohibit the BLM from approving any application for the expansion of existing mineral operations for locatable minerals under the general mining laws. Additionally, S. 5101 would

bar the BLM from approving sales contracts for common variety minerals under the Materials Act of 1947 and the Surface Resources Act of 1955 that would result in the expansion of existing mineral operations.

The BLM is currently reviewing a proposed 56-acre modification to the Mid-Continent Quarry's Plan of Operations. A broad prohibition on mineral operations and sales contracts would limit future opportunity for responsible resource development rather than allow the BLM to follow its well-established decision-making process. The BLM's technical review will thoroughly evaluate potential impacts associated with the proposed plan following the procedural requirements of NEPA to evaluate and disclose impacts while also adhering to Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) requirement to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation. The legal framework provided through NEPA, FLPMA, and the accompanying regulations in 43 CFR Parts 3600 and 3800, are sufficient to guide the BLM's decision.

H.R. 1682, BELO's Act

H.R. 1682 would amend the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) to extend eligibility for free passes to families of veterans who died as a result of service-related illnesses or accidents.

The Interagency Pass Program, formally known as the America the Beautiful: National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass, is a collaboration among six federal agencies, including the National Park Service (NPS), that provides access to more than 2,000 public land recreation sites nationwide. Each pass, including the Annual Pass, covers entrance and standard amenity fees. Current U.S. military personnel, their dependents, Gold Star Families, and U.S. military veterans are eligible to receive free annual or lifetime passes that cover entrance or standard amenity (day-use) fees, recognizing and honoring U.S. military members for their service and encouraging them to explore recreational opportunities on their public lands and waters.

The Department supports the intent of H.R. 1682 to expand access to national parks and other federal lands for these families and shares the bill's commitment to recognizing and honoring their service and sacrifice. However, to ensure the benefit can be administered effectively, we have concerns regarding the ability to accurately determine and verify eligibility for this expanded category of recipients. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these administrative challenges with the bill's Sponsor and the Committee to ensure that the legislation can be implemented effectively and that eligible families can obtain this meaningful benefit through a process that is both clear and efficient.