

## Obama misfired with Interior pick

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President-elect Barack Obama's nomination of Ken Salazar to be secretary of the Interior has been one of his most controversial Cabinet picks. The Colorado senator will certainly be leagues better than President Bush's choices, but most conservationists and scientists are looking for someone who will do much more than best the disastrous policies of Gale Norton and Dirk Kempthorne.

We are looking for someone to bring a fundamentally new direction to an agency that, during the past eight years, has suffered so much controversy it can barely function.

Just days before the Salazar nomination, the Department of the Interior inspector general released a report finding the agency to be deeply tarnished by high-level bureaucrats who routinely overrule, censor and ignore scientific findings that don't suit their agenda of making ever more lands available for development, mining and logging. Royalties were not collected on private development of public lands. And improper ties were established between the Interior Department and the corporations it is supposed to regulate. Scientists and managers who tried to obey the law and rein in the conflicts were

abused, transferred and taken out of essential decision-making loops.

Ken Salazar is no Gale Norton and certainly not a dyed-in-the-wool anti-environmentalist. But any objective observer would have to agree that his record is a mixed bag.

For every vote to slow oil and gas development, there is one to increase offshore-oil drilling. For every statement of concern for climate change, there is a vote to prevent the government from taking action. For every vote to improve national-park funding, there is a vote to prevent higher fuel-economy standards. For every complaint about oil companies, there is a vote to increase their federal subsidies.

Some have pointed to the approval of Salazar's nomination by a number of national environmental groups as evidence of his acceptability, if not qualification. But note that no environmental group endorsed or recommended Salazar before his name was leaked as a done deal by the Obama transition team at the eleventh hour.

Compare that with more than 150 environmental groups and about 60 scientists who endorsed the choice of Raul Grijalva, D-Ariz., while his name was in the running. Jay Inslee, D-Wash., was also endorsed by many groups. Inslee

and Grijalva not only have stellar environmental records, they have a long history of exposing and challenging Department of the Interior missteps and have shown a willingness and competency to take the agency in a new direction.

Salazar's judgment is as mixed as his conservation agenda. When we read the latest report by the inspector general or the Government Accountability Office denouncing the Interior Department built by Gale Norton, we should remember that Norton's appointment was actively supported by Ken Salazar, just as he supported the short but disastrous reign of Alberto Gonzales. This is the man whose judgment will shortly help determine who will head the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

Conservationists expected more from Obama; we expected a commitment to deep change and improvement. With this in mind, we'll keep a close watch on Salazar and demand the reform that was promised, regardless of who has been tapped to head the Interior Department.

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