

SALAZAR'S SUCCESSES

✖ I didn't think I'd be saying this, two weeks into the Obama Administration. But thus far, Ken Salazar has been the high point of the new Administration for me.

Yesterday, we learned via POGO that Salazar is interested in reopening cases against those at the Minerals Management Service who made a mockery of that department.

According to several sources at the department, Salazar is specifically interested in Gregory Smith and Lucy Denett. They're both former high-ranking Interior officials; Justice declined to prosecute either one.

Smith is a former director of the controversial royalty-in-kind program at MMS. He took tens of thousands of dollars in consulting fees from a company that wanted to do business with oil and gas companies, and accepted gifts and trips from the industry. Denett ran the Minerals Revenue Management agency, part of MMS, and steered more than \$1 million in contracts to a friend.

These are the alleged crimes, recall, referred to DOJ—including alleged sexual assault of a subordinate—that Michael Mukasey didn't think merited prosecution.

And today we get the news that Salazar is going to cancel Bush's last minute drilling leases on sensitive land in UT.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar is cancelling oil and gas leases on 77 parcels of federal land in Utah, according to sources familiar with the decision, ending a fierce battle over whether to allow energy exploration in the environmentally-sensitive area.

The Bush administration conducted the lease sale in December, but environmental groups went to court to block the winning bids encompassing roughly 110,000 acres near pristine areas such as Nine Mile Canyon, Arches National Park and Dinosaur National Monument.

Just before Bush left office last month, U.S. District Judge Ricardo M. Urbina issued a restraining order on the lease sales, postponing the final transactions until he could hear arguments on the merits of the case.

An Interior spokesman declined to comment on the matter, but several sources familiar with the decision said Salazar planned to announce it later today, adding that he can reject the winning bids without a penalty because the transactions had not become final and the department has the discretion to accept or reject lease bids that prevail at a public auction.

He's also modifying upcoming leases in Wyoming to account for local concerns about conservation and recreation.

Granted, thus far Salazar has simply set about reversing some of the most egregious abuses of the Bush Administration. But I gotta thank Salazar for making sure that's at least happening somewhere.