

# DICK CHENEY'S WYOMING'S FACE AT MMS

✘ Since we've been discussing the way that BP has adopted Dick Cheney's face for its Deepwater Horizon disaster, I thought I'd link to this article, noting how close the Mineral Management Service and Cheney's state of Wyoming are. (h/t POGO)

The federal agency cited for an overly "cozy relationship" with the energy industry, which may have contributed to the Deepwater Horizon drilling disaster, has enjoyed extensive Wyoming political and economic connections since its creation in 1982 by then-Secretary of Interior James G. Watt, a native of Lusk in eastern Wyoming.

[snip]

The Wyoming connection was especially evident from 2000 to 2008, during the two administrations of President George W. Bush and his vice president, Wyoming native Dick Cheney. A former chief executive of Halliburton, Cheney took an early and very active interest in energy policy and placed several Wyoming political friends in key positions in the Department of Interior.

Before he took office, for example, Cheney selected David J. Gribbin III, a high school and college friend from Wyoming, to be his transitional liaison with Congress. Gribbin previously worked for Cheney as Halliburton's chief lobbyist in the capital.

Cheney then chose Thomas Sansonetti, a prominent Cheyenne lawyer and GOP activist, to head the team choosing top personnel for the Department of

Interior, which oversees Minerals Management Service.

Sansonetti, a member of the conservative Federalist Society, picked Gayle Norton to head Interior. Although not from Wyoming, native Coloradan Norton was a longtime protégée of James Watt in the Mountain States Legal Foundation, of which Watt was the founding director. Like Sansonetti, Norton was a member of the Federalist Society.

Norton, in turn, named former Sheridan, Wyoming, lawyer Rebecca W. Watson as assistant Interior Secretary for Land and Minerals Management. Watson was responsible for the Bureau of Land Management, the Office of Surface Mining and the Minerals Management Service.

[snip]

Most importantly, from 2002 to 2008, the Minerals Management Service was directed by two former Wyoming GOP legislators, Rejane “Johnnie” Burton of Casper and Randall Luthi, of Freedom.

Burton, who had managed the Wyoming Department of Revenue under former Gov. Jim Geringer, in 2007 resigned under fire from her \$168,000-a-year Minerals Management director’s job after the Department of Interior Inspector General found widespread corruption in the agency’s Colorado-based royalty collection office, and questions were raised in Congress about Burton’s handling of offshore leases.

[snip]

Burton now works as a \$49,000-a-year aide for longtime friend and former legislative colleague Wyoming U.S. Rep. Cynthia Lummis.

There’s lots, lots more at the link.

Lummis, Wyoming's only Congressperson, is one of the many BP apologists on the Natural Resources Committee. But I guess it must be easy to be such an apologist, given that you've got former top Administration staffers working for you for less than a third of what they used to get in DC.

All of which suggests that one of the reasons the regulatory agency overseeing drilling on public lands is so lax is that it is captive to a bunch of Wyoming hacks who use the revenue from drilling in lieu of income taxes. You see, we've just sacrificed the Gulf's ecosystem because a bunch of folks from Wyoming want to pretend that drilling creates free money.

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