

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

September 4, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

The Committee is conducting ongoing oversight of employee misconduct issues at the U.S. Department of the Interior (Department). The Department employs approximately 70,000 people in 2,400 operating locations. Responsible for a vast and diverse set of missions, the Department has far reaching impacts on our national park system, energy development, species management, and our government's relationships with Indian tribes, Alaska Natives, and insular areas. As the Department engages in such important matters, those entrusted to execute corresponding responsibilities should be held to the highest ethical and professional standards.

On February 2, 2017, the Committee wrote to then-Acting Secretary Jack Haugrud to express concerns about the several years of disturbing cases of employee misconduct at the Department.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the Committee noted a pattern of Department employees found guilty of severe misconduct who were permitted to continue federal service indefinitely or for a prolonged period while facing minimal consequences.<sup>2</sup>

One such case highlighted in the Committee's February 2, 2017 letter was that of former Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Office of Law Enforcement Supervisory Agent Dan Love. Mr. Love's behavior was symptomatic of the Department's previous culture of mismanagement, which turned a blind eye to his corruption and abuse of authority. While the Department's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) initiated an investigation of Mr. Love in October 2015, it was under your leadership that his employment was finally terminated.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Rep. Rob Bishop, Chairman, H. Comm. on Natural Resources, to Kevin "Jack" Haugrud, Acting Sec'y, U.S. Dep't of the Interior (Feb. 2, 2017) (on file with Committee).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Press Release, Rep. Rob Bishop, Bishop Statement on Dan Love Employment Status (Sept. 18, 2017) (on file with Committee).

In September 2014, 13 former and current National Park Service (NPS) employees wrote a letter to then-Secretary Sally Jewell detailing incidents of sexual harassment they had experienced or witnessed at Grand Canyon National Park's River District (GCRA) during a period of 15 years.<sup>4</sup> The OIG investigated these allegations and uncovered a culture that tolerated sexual harassment and created a hostile work environment. The OIG also found that many of the incidents were not properly investigated or reported to Department officials.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, several workplace harassment and misconduct allegations at the Department were the subject of numerous congressional inquiries and hearings, including those from the Committee on Natural Resources.<sup>6</sup>

As these and other cases of serious misconduct were uncovered, the Committee appreciates efforts taken by you and your staff to address many of these issues. For example, in early 2017, the Department administered a workplace environment survey<sup>7</sup> and in April 2018, updated much-needed policies for preventing and eliminating workplace harassment.<sup>8</sup> You and your Deputy Secretary have also expressed commitments to implement a culture of accountability, transparency, and zero tolerance for inappropriate behavior within the Department to include terminating the employment of perpetrators of harassment and misconduct.<sup>9</sup>

Since January 2017, the Committee has held more than 40 oversight hearings and has written in excess of 35 oversight letters to the Department and the OIG.<sup>10</sup> Nearly half of these letters were related to the unethical behavior and workplace misconduct at the Department.<sup>11</sup> Workplace misconduct has long been a significant issue for the Department with high-profile incidents of egregious misconduct by Department employees dating back for decades.

Despite meaningful progress,<sup>12</sup> the Committee is vigilantly aware that workplace misconduct remains within the Department. In some cases, instances of serious workplace

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<sup>4</sup> OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. DEP'T OF THE INTERIOR, INVESTIGATIVE REPORT OF MISCONDUCT AT THE GRAND CANYON RIVER DISTRICT, (2016) *available at* [https://www.doiig.gov/sites/doiig.gov/files/Misconduct\\_GrandCanyonRiverDistrict\\_Public.pdf](https://www.doiig.gov/sites/doiig.gov/files/Misconduct_GrandCanyonRiverDistrict_Public.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *Investigating the Culture of Corruption at the Department of the Interior: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Oversight and Investigations of the H. Comm. on Natural Res.*, 114th Cong. (2016); *see also*, *The Administration's Response to Findings of Unethical and Criminal Conduct at the Department of the Interior: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Oversight & Investigations of the H. Comm. on Natural Res.*, 114th Cong. (2016).

<sup>7</sup> U.S. DEP'T OF THE INTERIOR, TECHNICAL REPORT, WORK ENVIRONMENT SURVEY, (2017) *available at* [https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/doi\\_wes\\_technical\\_report.pdf](https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/doi_wes_technical_report.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> *Personnel Bulletin 18-01*, U.S. DEP'T OF THE INTERIOR, <https://www.doi.gov/employees/anti-harassment/personnel-bulletin-18-01> (last visited Aug. 30, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Brian Maffly, *Interior Boss Blasts Fired Utah BLM Law Enforcement Agent*, SALT LAKE TRIBUNE, Sept. 25, 2017, *available at* <https://www.sltrib.com/news/environment/2017/09/25/interior-boss-blasts-fired-utah-blm-law-enforcement-agent/>.

<sup>10</sup> *Hearings & Markups*, H. COMM. ON NATURAL RES., <https://naturalresources.house.gov/calendar/list.aspx> (last visited Aug. 28, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> On file with Committee.

<sup>12</sup> Press Release, U.S. Dep't of the Interior, Interior Continues Steps Toward Department-wide Culture Change with Release of Work Environment Survey, (Dec. 14, 2017) (<https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-continues-steps-toward-department-wide-culture-change-release-work/>); *see also*: U.S. Dep't of the Interior, *New Anti-Harassment*,

misconduct were finally revealed during your tenure as Secretary while the initial allegations of unethical behavior and conflicts of interest were made during your predecessor's tenure.

For example, as the result of an investigation initiated on June 13, 2017 for misconduct committed in 2014, the OIG published a report on February 20, 2018 about a senior U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) official's violation of conflict of interest law.<sup>13</sup> The OIG concluded that Richard Ruggiero, Chief of the Division of International Conservation, International Affairs, "violated Federal laws and regulations by participating in an FWS cooperative agreement that financially benefited his [wife] . . ." <sup>14</sup> Neither Mr. Ruggiero nor his wife formally disclosed their relationship to FWS while he shared nonpublic information about the award with his wife, influenced the approval of an extension of the cooperative agreement, and initially misled investigators about his involvement in the agreement.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, on July 2, 2018, the OIG concluded that a BLM employee violated conflict of interest laws when he steered BLM contracts, totaling almost \$30,000, to a business that he and his wife owned, dating back to April 2016.<sup>16</sup> The employee also intentionally altered documents to facilitate payment to the business.<sup>17</sup>

This past summer, the OIG published reports uncovering unethical behavior and conflicts of interest involving senior NPS employees and nonprofit organizations associated with national parks. Dating back to 2010, the Superintendent of Whiskeytown National Recreation Area, James Milestone, routinely violated regulations by using his position to solicit and collect donations for a nonprofit group, and pressured subordinates and concessionaires to do the same.<sup>18</sup> Milestone also inappropriately provided free lodging accommodations for the group's fundraising events and had subordinates assist with the events. Another investigation revealed that in 2015, the former Superintendent of Acadia National Park, Sheridan Steele, illegally accepted almost \$15,000 in gifts from a nonprofit group and its board members.<sup>19</sup> He also arranged employment for himself with the group while still working as Superintendent, and violated law by attempting to influence park operations for the benefit of the group even after his retirement.<sup>20</sup>

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Policy, <https://www.doi.gov/employees/new-anti-harassment-policy> (last visited Aug. 28, 2018); *See also*: Memo from David L. Bernhardt, Deputy Secretary, U.S. Dep't of the Interior, to all Dep't of the Interior employees (Sept. 22, 2017), *available at* <https://www.doi.gov/employees/month-two-message>.

<sup>13</sup> OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. DEP'T OF THE INTERIOR, FWS SUPERVISOR ALLEGEDLY VIOLATED CONFLICT OF INTEREST ETHICS LAW, (2018) *available at* [https://www.doiig.gov/sites/doiig.gov/files/FWSCOnflictOfInterest\\_Public.pdf](https://www.doiig.gov/sites/doiig.gov/files/FWSCOnflictOfInterest_Public.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. DEP'T OF THE INTERIOR, REPORT OF INVESTIGATION ALLEGED MISCONDUCT BY BLM EMPLOYEE WITH OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT (2018) (on file with author).

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. DEP'T OF THE INTERIOR, ALLEGATIONS OF ETHICAL VIOLATIONS AND MISCONDUCT BY NPS SUPERINTENDENT, (2018) *available at* [https://www.doiig.gov/sites/doiig.gov/files/WebRedacted\\_NPSWhiskeytown.pdf](https://www.doiig.gov/sites/doiig.gov/files/WebRedacted_NPSWhiskeytown.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. DEP'T OF THE INTERIOR, REPORT OF INVESTIGATION: ETHICS VIOLATIONS BY FORMER ACADIA NATIONAL PARK SUPERINTENDENT, (May 2018) (on file with author).

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

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These and other instances of employee misconduct at the Department raise concerns about the Department's ability to foster an appropriate workplace culture. The Committee remains eager to work with you and the Department as it continues to address these challenges.

To assist the Committee's oversight of the Department's continuing response to cases of workplace misconduct, please provide the following documents and information as soon as possible, but no later than September 18, 2018:

1. Documents sufficient to show the status of the Department's comprehensive anti-harassment policy and individual bureau action plans for addressing harassment;
2. Documents sufficient to show the status of efforts to improve the Department's enforcement of ethical standards; and
3. A document sufficient to identify the number of Department employees terminated or disciplined for workplace misconduct by calendar year, since January 1, 2015.

Please contact the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-7107 with any questions about this request. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Rob Bishop  
Chairman