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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025

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July 11, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U. S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

I am writing to follow up on our exchange at the Subcommittee's June 21, 2017, hearing regarding the Department's reorganization plans and its efforts to transfer senior employees to new positions and duty stations.

I am deeply concerned by these recent decisions, especially since the ability of the Department to perform its core responsibilities—including its efforts to uphold its trust and treaty responsibilities with American Indians and Alaska Natives—rests on the recruitment and retention of a skilled and dedicated workforce. During the hearing, you provided assurances to the Subcommittee that the Department will follow all required laws, regulations, and procedures to move staff members. However, the decision to move this many individuals, using the bare legal minimum of notice necessary and with zero notice to Congress, Tribes or other affected stakeholders, raises questions about the real intent behind these changes.

As I understand it, Interior informed 30-50 of its most senior career SES staff members that they are being reassigned—some moved across the country to other positions, some to new bureaus entirely. These senior executives have expertise specific to their current bureaus, and they manage some of the most sensitive issues that affect cities, counties, states, and Indian tribes. And these moves are uprooting employees who have formed deep and lasting relationships with the surrounding communities—including individuals with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs and Bureau of Indian Affairs who have important working relationships with tribes—with virtually no notice and no input from those communities. Yet this Subcommittee has no idea why these positions were selected for reassignment, or how moving these individuals out of their current positions improves the management of the Department. We also don't know how these changes fit, if at all, into the larger workforce plan for the Department that you've been directed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to assemble—a workforce plan not yet approved or submitted to the Subcommittee.

During our hearing, you stated that you aspired to be "the most transparent" Secretary and that you supported "absolute transparency." To that end, please respond to the following questions:

1. What is the total number of Senior Executive Staff members (including SES, SL, ST and equivalents) who have received a directed relocation or directed reassignment since January 20, 2017? Please indicate how many individuals are affected for each bureau of the Department and information about the ultimate outcome of these proposed personnel actions. While the Secretary did mention privacy concerns during a recent Senate hearing, this request is not for any personal or identifying information, only the total amount of employees the Department affected by these recent decisions.
2. What criteria did the Department use to identify individuals selected for directed reassignment or relocation? Please provide the Subcommittee with a copy of the criteria used.
3. What criteria did the Department use to identify the positions and/or location to which the reassigned employees are to be moved? Please provide the Subcommittee with a copy of the criteria used.
4. Please identify the relevant laws, rules, regulations, policies and procedures followed by the Department in moving the SES positions, as well whether and how any consultation with affected employees occurred prior to notification of relocation or reassignment.
5. Were any third-party stakeholders consulted during the process to identify positions and/or individuals affected by these directed reassignments or relocations? If so, please provide a list.
6. What are the total estimated costs associated with these redirections and relocations, including all costs borne by the Department to pay for changes in duty station for employees? How does the Department plan to cover these costs, given that these changes were not anticipated when the Congress provided the Department with its fiscal year 2017 appropriation? Are there additional costs expected to be borne by the agency in fiscal year 2018 or future budget years?
7. How do these personnel moves related to the Department of the Interior's Agency Reform Plan, as directed by the OMB Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, dated April 12, 2017?
8. Why did the Department choose to undertake these personnel moves before its broader workforce plan is developed, approved by OMB, and shared with Congress?
9. Does the Department plan to engage in additional directed reassignments or relocations of its SES workforce during fiscal year 2017? If so, how many additional individuals will be affected? Please indicate how many individuals are affected for each bureau of the Department.

10. How would the reassignment of employees who are only a year or less from their planned retirement date further the goals of government efficiency, particularly if a geographic move is directed?
11. How many of the individuals affected by the announced executive reassignments and relocations have resigned or retired instead of taking a reassignment?
12. What percentage of the SES corps at Interior is eligible to retire? What percentage of the SES corps identified by Interior for reassignment is eligible to retire? What percentage of the SES corps identified by Interior for reassignment is not eligible to retire?
13. Are the reassignments having an age-relevant disparate impact on SES employees? If so, then how will you correct this effect?

As I understand, and you confirmed at the hearing, many of these changes are set to take place quickly, so your prompt response to this request is important. It is critical that this Subcommittee better understands these personnel decisions, which carry with them real consequences, for both the employees who must now uproot their lives, and for the constituents with whom they've worked, often hand in hand for decades.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies