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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6150

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July 24, 2017

Ms. Mary L. Kendall
Deputy Inspector General, Department of the Interior
The Udall Building, 1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Ms. Kendall,

We are writing to you in light of troubling newspaper reports of the arbitrary reassignment of as many as 50 Senior Executive Service employees of the Department of the Interior. The personal account of one of these employees appeared in the Washington Post on July 20.

Congress established the Senior Executive Service (SES) in 1978 “to ensure that the executive management of the Government of the United States is responsive to the needs, policies, and goals of the Nation and otherwise is of the highest quality.” The law establishing the SES requires that the SES be administered “to attract and retain highly competent senior executives,” to “protect senior executives from arbitrary and capricious actions,” and to “maintain a merit personnel system free of prohibited personal practices.”

Although the law allows the head of an agency to reassign senior executives, it contemplates that reassignments be made “to best accomplish the agency’s mission,” consistent with the law’s requirements that the SES be administered to “provide for program continuity and policy advocacy in the management of public programs,” that it “provide for an executive system which is guided by the public interest and free from improper political interference,” and that the assignment of SES employees be “consistent with the effective and efficient implementation of agency policies and responsibilities.” 5 U.S.C. § 3131.

Any suggestion that the Department is reassigning SES employees to force them to resign, to silence their voices, or to punish them for the conscientious performance of their public duties is extremely troubling and calls for the closest examination.

Ms. Mary L. Kendall
Page Two

We believe that any reassignment of highly trained, highly competent senior executives within the Department from the positions in which they may best use their training and competence to accomplish the Department's mission and best serve the public interest to sinecures where their talents are wasted would constitute a serious act of mismanagement, a gross waste of public funds, and an abuse of authority.

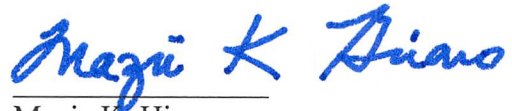
We therefore respectfully ask that you look into this matter and report the results of your investigation to the Secretary, the appropriate committees of Congress, and to us.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

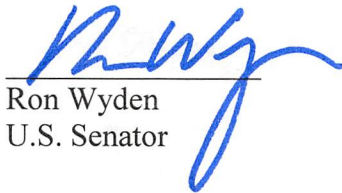
Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell
U.S. Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
U.S. Senator



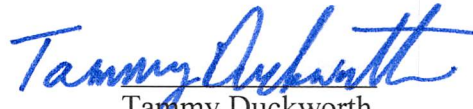
Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator



Martin Heinrich
U.S. Senator



Bernard Sanders
U.S. Senator



Tammy Duckworth
U.S. Senator



Debbie Stabenow
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