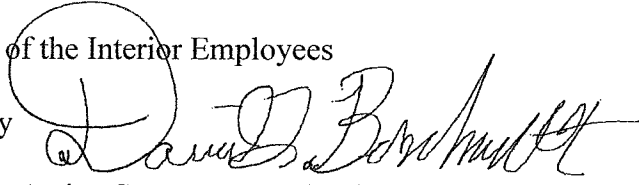




THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON

FEB 01 2019

Memorandum

To: All Department of the Interior Employees  
From: Acting Secretary   
Subject: A Message from Acting Secretary Bernhardt

In our first full week back as a team, I have spent a good deal of time visiting with many of you. I believe each person who works at Interior has chosen to work here not only because he or she believes in serving the people first, but also because of the love for Interior's mission. Together, we can make the Department even better. We maintain these values even when our conclusions differ. I know this because I have served at Interior in various positions off and on for nearly a decade. No one dedicates a decade of his or her life to any organization unless he or she fundamentally believes in that organization's mission. My appreciation and affection for our mission is real and deeply felt, and I know yours is, too.

Therefore, as I have done as Deputy Secretary, I will continue to share a few personal perspectives from time to time while I am Acting Secretary. By doing so, I hope you will have a better sense of where I am trying to lead our Department.

**PUBLIC SERVICE IS A HIGH CALLING**

I believe that serving the public is one of the highest callings a person can undertake. This belief has been reaffirmed in the past few weeks as many of you carried on fulfilling the Department's mission with the knowledge that the timing of your pay was highly uncertain. This perspective is why the notion that a public servant would breach the public trust to enrich themselves so deeply offends me. Such conduct undermines everything I believe in regarding public service.

While serving as Deputy Secretary, I personally devoted a tremendous amount of effort to transforming and enhancing the ethics infrastructure throughout our organization. It has been badly neglected for far too long. I want to ensure that we have a functional and resilient ethics program that facilitates our ability to fully embrace a culture of ethical compliance that will endure beyond this Administration.

Sadly, our organization's ethics challenges were part of a mess that we inherited. The last decade of the Inspector General's reports read like an avalanche of ethical misconduct. No Bureau is exempt from criticism.

The fact that the Bureaus within the Department face serious ethical challenges is unsurprising when you review the Inspector General's reports, which call attention to a cavalier approach to ethics compliance. For example, in 2016, Jon Jarvis, then-Director of the National Park Service,

who was also a career SES official, essentially stated after being confronted with his own ethical violations and delivering an “untruth” to the Secretary of the Interior, that he would have probably done the same thing again. The entire report can be accessed [here](#).

Such a view is precisely the opposite of what a culture of ethical compliance looks like. Not seeking ethics advice creates an organizational culture that is deeply flawed. I know and appreciate that fact. When leaders are not seeking ethics counsel, why should anyone else?

I have been focused on putting the pieces in place to dramatically transform a culture of ethics avoidance into one of ethical compliance. We began to strengthen the ethics program by recruiting experienced, non-partisan, career ethics professionals with the dedication and leadership skills necessary to build a best-in-class program. By the end of Fiscal Year 2019, we will have doubled the number of career ethics officials that the previous Administration hired in its entire 8 years.

These new employees include a new Designated Agency Ethics Official (DAEO), an Alternate DAEO, a Financial Disclosure Supervisor, an Ethics Education and Training Supervisor with the Department’s Ethics Office (DEO), as well as new Deputy Ethics Counselors at the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and other Bureaus and Offices. We will continue an aggressive recruitment of ethics officials through 2019.

The changes we have made to date, and the ones we are committed to making moving forward, are long overdue. Rather than give rhetorical lip service to ethical conduct, I have taken action. I am committed to leaving this Department better than I found it when I first started.

The Department will provide the necessary resources for you to seek ethics guidance. Please consult and listen to the ethics counselors.

## **CONCLUSION**

I look forward to working with you as we carry out and balance the multitude of mandates and authorities that make up the organization we call the Department of the Interior. I believe we can and must do so in a way that is good for the natural environment, as well as the communities, families, and individuals whose livelihoods depend on our decisions.