

INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK



November 14, 2020

President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr.
Biden-Harris Transition
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 2001

RE: Nomination of Rep. Debra Haaland for Secretary of the Interior

Dear President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr.,

The Indigenous Environmental Network, on behalf of its constituents and the undersigned allied organizations and groups, urge you to nominate Representative Debra Haaland (NM) as Secretary of the Department of the Interior. The Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) is a registered non-profit with 501(c)3 status. We are composed of a number of grassroots Indigenous groups. Our Goals are:

1. Educate and empower Indigenous Peoples to address and develop strategies for the protection of our environment, our health, and all life forms – the Circle of Life.
2. Reaffirm our traditional knowledge and respect of natural laws.
3. Recognize, support, and promote environmentally sound lifestyles, economic livelihoods, and the building of healthy sustaining Indigenous communities.
4. Commit to influence policies that affect Indigenous Peoples on a local, tribal, state, regional, national and international level.
5. Include youth and elders in all levels of our work.
6. Acknowledge the natural role and build upon the power of Indigenous women standing up to protect the sacredness of Mother Earth.
7. Protect our human rights to practice our cultural and spiritual beliefs.

As historical firsts have occurred in this election, there is an opportunity for another one by nominating a qualified and dynamic Indigenous woman to head the Department of Interior. The Department of the Interior is the steward for American public lands and for carrying out the United States trust responsibilities to American Indian and Alaskan Native tribes and Native Hawaiians. Public land issues have significant and disproportionate impacts upon Indigenous Peoples and our inherent and cultural and spiritual relationships to lands and waters. Many of the issues that Indigenous Peoples in the United States face involve the opening up of public lands for fossil fuel and uranium development, clear cutting of forests, and the diminishment of

previously protected lands harboring sacred areas and heritage sites. Too often, the Indigenous voice is silenced with inequitable consultation, and without due diligence prior to decisions on impacts upon Indigenous interests. Representative Haaland has demonstrated insight and leadership on these issues while serving as the vice-chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs still has significant impact upon the five hundred and seventy-four (574) recognized Indian tribes, and in setting policy impacting upon all enrolled tribal members including the Indian Health Service. In addition, the Department of Interior is responsible for defending tribal sovereignty, ensuring that the legal trust responsibility of the United States toward Indian nations is upheld, and that Indian land oversight is conducted in a responsible way. Representative Haaland has intimate knowledge of all of this, being an enrolled member of the Laguna Pueblo and possessing a Juris Doctorate with an emphasis in Federal Indian Law.

We are grassroots Indigenous Peoples, tribal citizens enrolled in our respective Native Nations that embrace Indigenous Knowledge, and maintain our spiritual and cultural ways. We are organized as Indigenous non-governmental entities and have always expressed our voices, within the sovereignty of our Native Nations, afforded the same opportunities to participate in US government decision-making processes as would any other US citizen or non-governmental organization. We want a future for our children in which these ways continue to thrive. In the past it has always been a struggle to have government agencies understand this. Sometimes progress has been made and sometimes we have faced major setbacks. There is a unique opportunity at this time to have a highly competent person take the reins at the Department of Interior that understands all of its dynamics and does not have to be educated on the depth of their meaning.

Our belief is that Representative Haaland will help facilitate the Biden/Harris vision for dealing with climate change, addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in Indian Country, ensuring an effective economic just recovery plan for Tribes and communities, overseeing the protection of public lands and fulfilling all treaty and statutory obligations. Representative Haaland has already shown her capacity in all of these areas, and being the first Indigenous woman to head the Department of Interior will inspire and provide hope not only to the Indigenous Peoples of this land, but also to all those who have vision for the future.

Signed and endorsed by the following organizations:

Indigenous Environmental Network

Native Movement

Gwich'in Steering Committee

Mazaska Talks

Last Real Indians

Pueblo Action Alliance

Kokipasni

RedTailed Hawk Collective

Title Track

Rising Hearts
Water Protector Legal Collective
Two Spirit Nation
California Kitchen
Eastern Cherokee Organization
West Virginia Native American Coalition
The Miami Valley Council for Native Americans
Murdered and Missing Indigenous People of Oklahoma
Stop the Plains All American Pipeline
Eastern Cherokee Organization
Native American Community Board
Mothers Against Meth Alliance
Thrive Unltd
California Kitchen
Ft Berthold POWER
Rising Voices
Stop Gold Mining in Sacred HeSapa
Descendants Alliance