

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 3, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Haaland,

Transparency is “fundamental to good governance and accountability,” and acutely needed for agency leaders.¹ For the previous Administration, Natural Resources Committee (Committee) Democrats deemed the practice of publishing the Department of the Interior (DOI) Secretary’s external calendar weekly as an insufficient practice in transparency, and requested additional details about meetings.² Although you were a member of the Committee during that oversight effort, almost all of your calendars as Secretary remain unavailable to the public.³ The principles of transparency transcend administrations, and the American people deserve to know who is influencing government leaders’ decision making. DOI’s current practice raises serious questions about proper records maintenance and if your schedule is being deliberately withheld.

Despite being confirmed 234 days ago,⁴ only 12 days of your schedule are publicly available.⁵ As DOI pushes misguided policies, like locking up access to public lands, limiting water supplies to farmers and communities, and hampering domestic energy and mineral production, publication of your calendar is necessary to evaluate how and with whom your time is spent. The continued absence of your calendars from public view actively conceals such critical information. Publishing your calendar will help shed light on how our nation’s environmental and natural resources policies are being shaped.

Government transparency not only requires adequate levels of disclosure to the public, but also timely production of requested information. In a July 28, 2021 webinar, DOI Communications Director Melissa Schwartz conceded DOI failed to publish your calendar, and

¹ Letter from Rep. Raúl Grijalva, Chair, H. Comm. on Nat. Res. and Rep. T.J. Cox, Chair, Subcomm. on Oversight and Investigations, H. Comm. on Nat. Resources to The Honorable David Bernhardt, Acting Secretary, Dep’t of the Interior (Feb. 7, 2019) (on file with Comm.).

² Stephanie Ebbs, *Interior Sends Thousands of Documents to House Committee Ahead of Acting Interior Secretary David Bernhardt’s Senate Confirmation Hearing*, ABC NEWS (Mar. 26, 2019), <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/ethics-officers-cleared-acting-interior-secretary-david-bernhardt/story?id=61933153>.

³ See *Secretary Haaland’s External Schedule*, DEP’T OF THE INTERIOR, <https://www.doi.gov/secretarys-schedule> (last visited Nov. 1, 2021); *Calendars*, OS FOIA, DEP’T OF THE INTERIOR, <https://www.doi.gov/foia/os/secretarial-calendars> (last visited Nov. 1, 2021); see also Tristan Justice, *Watchdog Group Sues Interior Department Over Access to Secretary Deb Haaland’s Schedule*, *The Federalist* (Sept. 29, 2021), <https://thefederalist.com/2021/09/29/watchdog-group-sues-interior-department-over-access-to-secretary-deb-haaland-schedule/>.

⁴ *On the Nomination (Confirmation: Debra Anne Haaland, of New Mexico, to be Sec’y of the Interior): Roll Call Vote before U.S. Senate*, 117th Cong. (Mar. 15, 2021).

⁵ *Supra* note 3.

stated, “I, myself, promised reporters that we would have the calendar up and have blown through my own deadline”⁶ Ms. Schwartz continued in the same webinar, “we’re really trying to use August – perhaps slightly a quieter time – to get all of [the calendars] up and get us all caught up.”⁷ Months later, nearly 95 percent of your calendars remain hidden from the public.

In addition to admitting to the protracted failure to publish your calendars, Ms. Schwartz disturbingly attributed the delay to aesthetic issues. Specifically, Ms. Schwartz stated:

Sometimes the data dump in a FOIA is less, um, just doesn’t look as nice as a communications professional might want it to look. So, also sort of navigating what the rules might be of taking a FOIA of her calendar and actually making it more pleasant to the eye.⁸

Ensuring the availability of a robust and thorough production of documents is one matter, but avoiding publication altogether under the guise of satisfying aesthetics concerns from the communications professionals is wholly unacceptable.

Rather than continuing the previous two administrations’ practice of routinely disclosing the Secretary’s schedule, meeting requests, and travel records,⁹ under the Biden Administration, DOI continues withholding this information. We urge you to adopt the practice of previous administrations and publish your calendars immediately. In the meanwhile, to assist with our oversight activities, please produce the following, as soon as possible, but no later than 5:00 p.m. November 17, 2021:

1. A copy of your calendars, including, but not limited to, participants, meeting length, travel records, and objectives, from March 15, 2021 to November 3, 2021.
2. A document sufficient to describe DOI’s procedures for publishing the Secretary’s calendar, including, but not limited to, the individuals involved in the approval process and timeliness standards.
3. All documents and communications, including, but not limited to, internal memoranda and e-mails, referring or relating to the aesthetic considerations of publishing your calendars, from March 15, 2021 to November 3, 2021.

⁶ *SEJ Webinar – Can We Talk? Getting the Story from Biden’s Interior Department*, SOCIETY OF ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISTS (July 28, 2021), <https://www.sej.org/calendar/sej-webinar-can-we-talk-getting-story-biden-s-interior-department>

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Tristan Justice, *Watchdog Group Sues Interior Department Over Access to Secretary Deb Haaland’s Schedule*, THE FEDERALIST (Sept. 29, 2021), <https://thefederalist.com/2021/09/29/watchdog-group-sues-interior-department-over-access-to-secretary-deb-haalands-schedule/>.

4. Any and all Meeting Information Request Forms or similar request forms submitted to the Office of Scheduling and Advance or other DOI officials to request a meeting with you or a surrogate, from March 15, 2021 to November 3, 2021.

Please contact the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Minority staff at (202) 225-7107 and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Minority staff at (202) 224-7875 with any questions about this request and to coordinate the delivery of your response to room 1329 of the Longworth House Office Building.

An attachment contains additional instructions for responding to this request. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources



John Barrasso, M.D.
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural
Resources

cc: The Honorable Raúl Grijalva, Chair, House Committee on Natural Resources
The Honorable Joe Manchin III, Chair, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural
Resources

Enclosure