Statement of

Debra Anne Haaland

Nominee for the Position of

Secretary of the Department of the Interior

Before the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

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Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso; Members of the Committee, thank you for having me here today.

I wouldn't be here without the love and support of my child Somah, partner Skip, my mom Mary Toya, my extended family, and generations of ancestors who sacrificed so much, so I could be here today. I acknowledge that we are on the ancestral homelands of the Nakochtank, Anacostan, and Piscataway people.

As many of you know, my story is unique. Although today I serve as a Member of Congress and was the vice-chair of the House Natural Resources Committee, if confirmed, I would be the first Native American to serve as a Cabinet Secretary. The historic nature of my confirmation is not lost on me, but I will say that it is not about me.

Rather, I hope this nomination would be an inspiration for Americans - moving forward together as one nation and creating opportunities for all of us.

As the daughter of a Pueblo woman, I was taught to value hard work. My mother is a Navy veteran, was a civil servant at the Bureau of Indian Education for 25 years, and she raised four kids as a military wife. My dad, the grandson of immigrants, was a 30-year career Marine who served in Vietnam. He received the Silver Star and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

I spent summers in Mesita, our small village on Laguna Pueblo, the location of my grandparents' traditional home. It was there that I learned about our culture from my grandmother by watching her cook and by participating in traditional feast days and ceremonies.

It was in the cornfields with my grandfather where I learned the importance of water and protecting our resources and where I gained a deep respect for the Earth.

As a military family, we moved every few years when I was a kid, but no matter where we lived, my dad taught me and my siblings to appreciate nature, whether on a mountain trail or walking along the beach.

I'm not a stranger to the struggles many families across America face today – I've lived most of my adult life paycheck to paycheck. I have pieced together health care for me and my child as a single mom, and at times relied on food stamps to put food on the table.

It's because of these struggles that I fully understand the role Interior must play in the President's plan to build back better; to responsibly manage our natural resources to protect them for future generations - so that we can continue to work, live, hunt, fish, and pray among them.

I understand how important the Department is for all the stakeholders who rely on it and for the communities whose economies are connected to it. I know the bipartisan accomplishments of this Committee stand out in Congress. Your work led to Interior having significant resources and authorities, especially with the Great American Outdoors Act and the Public Lands package. I will work collaboratively with all members of this committee to ensure these acts are implemented well.

As chair of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, I also worked on these issues in Congress and listened to all of my colleagues and constituents about ways to improve management of the Department. I am proud of the bipartisan manner in which we moved these bills through my subcommittee and to the House floor.

As I've learned in this role, there's no question that fossil energy does and will continue to play a major role in America for years to come. I know how important oil and gas revenues are to fund critical services.

But we must also recognize that the energy industry is innovating, and our climate challenge must be addressed. Together we can work to position our nation and all of its people for success in the future, and I am committed to working cooperatively with all stakeholders, and all of Congress, to strike the right balance going forward.

As part of this balance, the Department has a role in harnessing the clean energy potential of our public lands to create jobs and new economic opportunities. The President's agenda demonstrates that America's public lands can and should be engines for clean energy production. President Biden also knows that restoring and conserving our lands – through a Civilian Climate Corps – has the potential to spur job creation.

If confirmed, I will work my heart out for everyone:

- The families of fossil fuel workers who help build our country
- Ranchers and farmers who care deeply for their lands
- Communities with legacies of toxic pollution
- People of color whose stories deserve to be heard

- And those who want jobs of the future.

I vow to lead the Interior Department ethically, and with honor and integrity.

- I will listen to and work with members of Congress on both sides of the aisle.
- I will support Interior's public servants and be a careful steward of taxpayer dollars.
- I will ensure that the Interior Department's decisions are based on science.
- I will honor the sovereignty of Tribal nations and recognize their part in America's story.
- And I will be a fierce advocate for our public lands.

I believe we all have a stake in the future of our country, and I believe that every one of us – Republicans, Democrats, and Independents – shares a common bond: our love for the outdoors and a desire and obligation to keep our nation livable for future generations.

I carry my life experiences with me everywhere I go. It's those experiences that give me hope for the future. If an Indigenous woman from humble beginnings can be confirmed as Secretary of the Interior, our country holds promise for everyone.

Finally, I want to give special thanks to Chairman Manchin for calling this hearing today, and for sharing with me the issues and needs of the people he represents in West Virginia. If confirmed, I will listen to all of the people represented by members of this Committee and this Congress.

I'm grateful for your time today, and I'm ready to serve. I look forward to your questions.