

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 30, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street Northwest  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We are deeply troubled by recent findings by the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) Office of the Inspector General that detail unethical conduct by your office. As Secretary of the Interior, your obligation is to carry out the mission of protecting our public lands and conserving our nation's precious natural resources—an undertaking that must transcend politics or private agendas. As such, we demand that you cease using taxpayer-funded activities for personal gain.

Last week, the DOI Office of the Inspector General issued a report of its investigation into alleged abuses of your position. The report highlighted a troubling pattern of attempts to allow family members and special guests to benefit from taxpayer-funded government travel—even if doing so required skirting agency policy. The report, for example, states that you “asked DOI employees to research the legal and ethical implications of making [your wife] an official DOI volunteer”—a move that would have permitted her travel in government vehicles at the taxpayers' expense and violated preexisting agency policy. Your willingness to skirt agency policy meant to minimize misuse of taxpayer dollars is deeply concerning.

Another example of alleged abuse involved a boat trip to the Channel Islands taken by you, your spouse, another family relative and two “stakeholders.”<sup>1</sup> The “stakeholders” were purportedly invited as “subject experts,” and cleared by agency officials on that basis. However, it later turned out that they were family friends who had hosted a fundraiser for your 2014 congressional campaign—information that was not provided to the agency ethics officials responsible for approving the stakeholders' travel. A National Park Service Channel Islands employee informed the Office of Inspector General that “it was never clear what purpose the invitational travelers served” and that he could have provided the same information as they did. You reportedly reimbursed the government \$142 to cover your spouse's and the other relative's passage on the boat—but the totality of the circumstances conveys the impression of a personal trip carried out at taxpayer expense.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of the Inspector General. “DOI Inspector General Report on Secretary Zinke's Alleged Abuse of Office,” *The Washington Post*. October 22, 2018. Accessed October 24, 2018. <http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/national/doi-inspector-general-report-on-secretary-zinkes-alleged-abuse-of-office/3245/>.

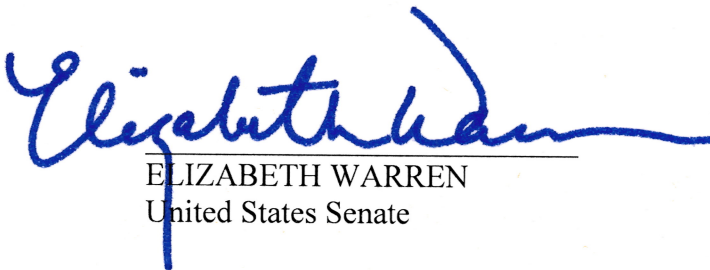
Since taking office in March 2017, you have been subject to a jaw-dropping 15 federal investigations, several of which are ongoing, raising many questions into your conduct at DOI.<sup>2</sup> This pattern of unethical, corrosive conduct is completely inconsistent with your obligation to our nation's public lands. Therefore, we urge you to immediately cease any efforts to use the office of the Secretary of the Interior for personal gain and fully reimburse the public for your private use of public resources.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your timely response specifying the steps you will take to restore the public's trust in your office.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senate



ELIZABETH WARREN  
United States Senate



RON WYDEN  
United States Senate

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<sup>2</sup> Zhang, Caroline. "A Guide to the 15 Federal Investigations into Ryan Zinke." *CREW*. August 9, 2018. Accessed October 24, 2018. <https://www.citizensforethics.org/a-guide-to-the-14-federal-investigations-into-ryan-zinke/>.