

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

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January 30, 2014

The Honorable Rhea Suh  
Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management, and Budget  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Assistant Secretary Suh:

On January 17, 2014, the Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee received your responses to questions that members submitted following your nomination hearing in December. Because you currently serve in a senior position at the Department of the Interior (Interior) and have done so since 2009, I am disappointed you did not provide the Committee with thorough answers about many policies implemented at Interior during this Administration.

Rather than follow up with numerous requests, I simply ask that you provide me with additional, comprehensive information regarding question 24, which is attached and relates to contracts given by Interior to former political appointees. In response to my questions, you stated that Interior posts information about spending and acquisitions on USASpending.gov. You further explained that Interior “does not maintain a specific list of contracts, subcontracts, and other similar agreements...that have been awarded by the Department to former political appointees or firms that are associated with former political appointees.” In your leadership role over Interior’s contracting program, I expect you to provide a better answer on how the Interior tracks its contracts and detailing if is the common practice for former political appointees to receive contracts from Interior after they end their government service. Additionally, please provide thorough responses to the following questions:

1. Are all contracts, subcontracts, and other similar agreements approved at Interior listed on USASpending.gov?
2. If there are contracts, subcontracts, or other similar agreements that are approved at Interior that are not listed on USASpending.gov, please provide me with a list of those contracts, subcontracts, or other similar agreements.
3. Please provide me with a list of all individuals and entities that have received contracts, subcontracts, or other similar agreements that have been approved by Interior in relation to the Indian buyback program.

4. Please provide me with a list of all political appointees who have served at Interior since January 20, 2009.

As the chief contracting officer at Interior, you are in charge of managing the budget. A complete answer to my questions is well within your competency. You have cited knowledge of issues within your management purview as one qualification for why you should be promoted to a new role within Interior. A thorough answer to these straightforward questions will help ensure that Interior is living up to President Obama's promise to run "the most transparent administration in history."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Vitter". The signature is stylized with a large initial "D" and a long horizontal stroke.

David Vitter  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Environment and Public Works

Questions from Sen. Vitter

**24. As the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget, you oversee contracting at the Department of the Interior. I am concerned about former political appointees who take advantage of their connections with the Department by using those connections to obtain contracts with the Department.**

**So that I can better understand the extent to which this practice is occurring, please provide me with a list of all contracts, subcontracts, and other similar agreements including, but not limited to, contracts associated with the Indian buyback program, that have been approved at the Department in the past four years to former political appointees or to firms associated with former political appointees.**

**Response:** The Department has a commitment to transparency and sharing of information and posts its acquisitions on USASpending.gov. I understand that the Department does not maintain a specific list of all contracts, subcontracts, and other similar agreements including, but not limited to, contracts associated with the Indian buyback program, that have been awarded by the Department to former political appointees or to firms that are associated with former political appointees. In my current role as the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget I oversee the Department's contracting program and I know that contracts are managed closely by career experts in Federal procurement. These professional employees help to ensure that all procurement actions meet all Federal legal requirements. Furthermore, government-wide ethics regulations help to guide these professionals in the protection of these interests. I take ethics issues very seriously and in my career in the Department I have made this a priority and will continue to do so.