

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

May 30, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I write to express deep concern and request answers regarding a reported blanket freeze on personnel actions across the Department of the Interior (Department)—including reassignments and changes in duty station—reportedly issued on May 2, 2025 by the Department’s acting Chief Human Capital Officer, a former staffer of Elon Musk’s so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). This sweeping directive has already sparked internal conflict at the Department, where staff are reportedly struggling to fulfill the duties of thousands of now-vacant positions essential to the Department’s day-to-day operations.¹ As Secretary of the Interior, you have a duty to ensure that bureaus within the Department have the staff and resources needed to perform their Congressionally mandated functions. Your actions to date raise serious doubts about your commitment to that obligation.

The Department is already operating under extraordinary strain after thousands of dedicated public servants have been pushed out through mass firings and DOGE-led “voluntary” buyouts backed by the threat of termination. The Administration’s proposed “skinny budget” would further slash staffing. The Department’s Reductions in Force (RIF) plans will hollow out agency capacity even further. The reported freeze on personnel actions will only deepen this crisis.

Together, these efforts amount to a coordinated campaign of institutional dismantling which threatens the safety of our parks, the reliability of our water systems, and the scientific integrity of the very agencies entrusted with protecting Americans from wildfire, drought and other escalating risks. The reported removal of BLM Deputy Director Michael Nedd, who reportedly raised concerns about the effects of the May 2 personnel directive on the Department’s ability to do its job, further compounds concerns about operational capacity and instability within the Department.^{2 3}

¹ Ben Lefebvre, “DOGE appointee sparks turf battle at Interior: ‘Ignore the email from HR,’” *POLITICO*, May 24, 2025. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/05/24/interior-department-land-bureau-pushes-against-doge-00360303>

² Joselow, Maxine. "Bureau of Land Management ousts official who reportedly resisted DOGE." *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2025. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/05/27/bureau-land-management-doge-nedd/>

³ Lefebvre, Ben. "BLM official escorted out of building after DOGE conflict." *POLITICO*, May 27, 2025. <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/05/27/blm-leader-office-doge-dust-up-00371860>

Congress must be told how you intend to keep the Interior Department operational in light of these compounding actions and proposals. To that end, please provide a copy of the May 2, 2025 personnel memo issued by the acting Chief Human Capital Officer, and respond to the following questions no later than **June 5, 2025**:

1. What impact assessment, if any, was conducted to evaluate the personnel freeze's impact on mission delivery and public safety for each Interior Department bureau?
2. Given recent losses of institutional knowledge due to firings and retirements, what is the Department's plan to maintain essential functions—including fire prevention and mitigation, tribal consultation, permitting, enforcement, and staffing of national parks and public lands during the Summer season—if hiring and staff reassignment remain frozen?
3. What personnel actions have been delayed or cancelled as a result of the freeze on personnel actions across the Department? Please provide a list of all actions, including affected bureau, location, and the anticipated operational impact.
4. Have any other senior Department personnel been fired, reassigned or penalized for raising objections to the May 2 directive or related personnel actions? Please provide names, titles and dates of any such actions.
5. How long will the personnel freeze last?

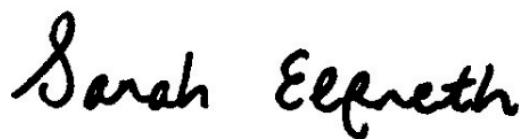
Like other recent personnel actions, this latest personnel freeze is, at best, shortsighted and self-defeating—and at worst, illegal and dangerous for Americans who visit our National Parks, live near federal lands, rely on federal irrigation for their farms, or depend on sound science to protect their homes and communities. It represents yet another ill-considered action by the Trump Administration that leaves our country weaker, less safe, and less prepared to meet the challenges ahead. Given the stakes, and the damage already unfolding, transparency from your Department is not a courtesy; it is an obligation. The American people, and the members of Congress elected to represent them, are not only deserving of transparency from your Department—they are entitled to it.

You may contact the Natural Resources Committee minority staff at (202) 225-6065 with any questions about this request.

Sincerely,



Jared Huffman
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources



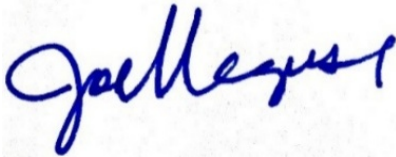
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