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May 7, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
The Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On March 26, 2025, I wrote to you to express serious concern over your decision to appoint Tyler Hassen to a role responsible for performing the functions and duties of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget in an acting capacity¹. I outlined the delegation ran afoul of the Vacancies Reform Act. Troublingly, instead of revoking Mr. Hassen's delegation, you have further empowered him.

On April 17, 2025, you signed a Secretarial Order giving Mr. Hassen extensive authority over Departmental functions.² Under the Order, Mr. Hassen, who joined the Department of the Interior ("DOI" or "Department") as a member of Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), is now responsible for a broad portfolio, including human resources, contracting, federal financial assistance, and information technology.³ The Order appears to give Mr. Hassen free reign over key Departmental restructuring and decision-making for an indefinite

¹ Letter from Martin Heinrich, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, to Doug Burgum, Secretary, Department of Interior, March 26, 2025. See also referencing "Secretarial Order 3414, Amendment 3: Establishment of New Department Leadership Team and Temporary Redelegation of Authority," Department of the Interior. <https://www.doi.gov/document-library/secretary-order/3414-establishment-new-department-leadership-team-and-temporary> and <https://www.doi.gov/document-library/secretary-order/so-3414-a3-amendment-so-3414-establishment-new-department>; "DOGE Official Appointed Head of Policy at Interior," Greenwire, March 10, 2025. <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/03/10/doge-official-appointed-head-of-policy-at-interior-00220327>.

² "Secretarial Order 3429 – Consolidation, Unification, and Optimization of Administrative Functions," Department of the Interior, April 17, 2025. <https://www.doi.gov/document-library/secretary-order/so-3429-consolidation-unification-and-optimization-administrative>. See also "Interior Secretary Gives DOGE Aide Sweeping Powers to Remake Department," Washington Post, April 21, 2025. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/04/21/tyler-hassen-department-of-interior/>.

³ "Interior Secretary Gives DOGE Aide Sweeping Powers to Remake Department," Washington Post, April 21, 2025. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/04/21/tyler-hassen-department-of-interior/>.

period of time without a set expiration date.⁴

Indeed, it appears that Mr. Hassen has wielded significant power since arriving at DOI. Mr. Hassen—appearing with Mr. Musk in a *Fox News* interview—touted reviewing “every single contract, every single grant” at DOI.⁵ In the same interview, Mr. Hassen boasted about access to you, stating, “[w]hen things come to my attention that don’t make sense, I’m bringing them to Secretary Burgum. He’s been fantastic. He’s a businessman, he’s very supportive of DOGE.”⁶ In recent months, the Department has undergone drastic changes. DOI has fired thousands of hardworking public servants and additional reductions in force (RIF) are reportedly looming.⁷ The Department has also pushed employees to voluntarily resign or take early retirement through buyout offers.⁸ According to reports, in February, DOI fired more than 2,000 employees, which has been the subject of litigation.⁹ In April, the Department reportedly fired the agency’s Chief Information Officer, Chief Information Security Officer, and others in the solicitor’s office after they objected to DOGE gaining access to a major payroll and personnel systems that processes the salaries of approximately 276,000 employees.¹⁰

Your latest action to further empower Mr. Hassen underscores your willingness to freely hand over the keys to the Department to a DOGE representative. The Department plays a vital role in managing public lands, safeguarding cultural resources, and engaging in responsible energy development. Delegating sweeping authorities and responsibilities to a non-Senate confirmed person in violation of the Vacancies Reform Act is baffling and extremely troubling.

⁴ “Secretarial Order 3429 – Consolidation, Unification, and Optimization of Administrative Functions,” Department of the Interior, April 17, 2025. <https://www.doi.gov/document-library/secretary-order/so-3429-consolidation-unification-and-optimization-administrative>; “Interior Secretary Gives DOGE Aide Sweeping Powers to Remake Department,” Washington Post, April 21, 2025. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/04/21/tyler-hassen-department-of-interior/>.

⁵ “Elon Musk and DOGE Team Sit Down with Bret Baier in ‘Special Report’ Exclusive,” Fox News, March 28, 2025. <https://www.foxnews.com/video/6370654580112>.

⁶ Id.

⁷ “Interior Moves Toward Workforce Cuts with Latest Staff Request,” E&E News/Greenwire, April 25, 2025. <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/04/25/interior-moves-toward-workforce-cuts-with-latest-staff-request-00309481>

⁸ “Interior Urges Staffers to Quit with New Offer,” E&E News, April 4, 2025, <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/04/04/interior-urges-staffers-to-quit-with-new-offer-00273030>.

⁹ Interior Department Fires 2,300 Employees After OPM Directive,” The Hill, February 14, 2025, <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/5145945-interior-department-fires-probationary-employees/>; “Fired Federal Workers Stuck in Limbo After Judges Order Return,” Bloomberg Law, March 20, 2025. <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/daily-labor-report/fired-federal-workers-stuck-in-limbo-after-judges-order-return>.

¹⁰ “Interior Fires Senior Leaders After Fight Over DOGE Access to Key Payroll System,” NextGov, April 9, 2025. <https://www.nextgov.com/people/2025/04/interior-fires-senior-leadership-after-fight-over-doge-access-key-payroll-system/404421/>; “DOGE Accesses Federal Payroll System Over Objections of Career Staff,” New York Times, March 31, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/31/us/politics/doge-musk-federal-payroll.html>; “Interior Secretary Gives DOGE Aide Sweeping Powers to Remake Department,” Washington Post, April 21, 2025. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/04/21/tyler-hassen-department-of-interior/>.

To better understand the basis of your delegation of authorities to Mr. Hassen, as well as the breadth of workforce reductions at the Department, please provide the following information by May 21, 2025:

Appointment

1. Prior to your appointment of Mr. Hassen to a role responsible for performing the functions and duties of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget, did the Department assess whether the delegation of authority complied with the Vacancies Reform Act? If so, please provide a copy of the Department's analysis.
2. The Vacancies Reform Act permits only three categories of Government officials to perform the functions of a vacant office in an acting capacity.¹¹ Please indicate if Mr. Hassen meets any of these three categories.
3. What is Mr. Hassen's current employment classification (*e.g.*, Schedule C employee or another classification)? In responding to this question, please also provide all other employment classifications Mr. Hassen has served under at the Department and the dates of service for each classification.

Terminations and Workforce Reductions

4. Please provide the current and planned staffing levels at the Department. In responding to this question, please provide the following information:
 - a. A detailed breakdown and the reason for the staff changes at the Department (*e.g.*, retirement, termination, participation in a Deferred Resignation Program, or other action) and corresponding figures for each category listed.
5. For each bureau and program office, please provide the following information:
 - a. The number of employees in each bureau and program office on January 20, 2025, and the current number of employees in that bureau and program office.
 - b. A detailed description of planned changes to workforce in each bureau and program office, including target employment numbers for each bureau and program office.
6. Prior to making workforce reductions at the Department or offering the Deferred Resignation Program option to employees, did the Department conduct a comprehensive analysis to understand if such reductions compromised the Department's ability to meet its statutory mission? If so, please provide the Committee with a copy of that analysis.
7. Does DOI plan to eliminate, merge, or reduce the function of any bureau or program office? If so, please explain.
8. Please provide all documents and communications between Mr. Hassen and agents or representatives of DOGE referring or relating to terminations and workforce reductions at DOI.
9. Please provide all documents and communications between Mr. Hassen and OMB referring or relating to terminations and workforce reductions at DOI.

¹¹ 5 USC § 3345

Grants and Contract Terminations and Renegotiations

10. Please provide a list of all Department grants or contracts DOGE has identified for termination or renegotiation. In responding to this question, please provide the following information:
 - a. A description of each grant or contract DOGE has identified for termination or renegotiation and the current status.
 - b. DOGE's justification for terminating or renegotiating the grant or contract.
11. Since January 20, 2025, has the Department terminated or recompleted any contract? If so, please provide the following information for each contract terminated or recompleted:
 - a. A description of the contract terminated or recompleted.
 - b. The reason the Department terminated or recompleted the contract.
12. Since January 20, 2025, has the Department entered into any new contracts? If so, please provide detailed information.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my staff at (202) 224-4971.

Sincerely,



Martin Heinrich
Ranking Member