



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

WASHINGTON

FEB 28 2019

The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I have received your letter dated February 7, 2019. In that letter, you expressed that transparency is fundamental to good governance and accountability. Moreover, you explained that “the need for transparency is even more acute in our leaders.” I agree.

I have inquired with the Department of the Interior’s (Department) Office of the Solicitor and have been advised that I have no legal obligation to personally maintain a calendar. Further, no Agency guidance exists recommending that I create or retain one. I have not personally maintained a calendar for years, and I have no intention of suddenly doing so now.

I am committed to ensuring that I am acting consistent with the ethics agreement I signed, the ethics pledge I signed, and all relevant regulatory requirements. To help facilitate such compliance, each meeting I have with an external non-governmental party is carefully screened by the Department’s Ethics Office prior to being placed on my schedule. I consistently follow the ethics official’s guidance and will continue to do so as I oversee the largest expansion of the Department’s ethics program in its history.

Numerous people create calendar entries on what can be labeled my calendar to maintain a schedule for the organization of daily appointments, both personal and official. However, the details of the schedule I receive each day are publicly provided. To the extent Agency records are created through that process, they are appropriately maintained to fully comply with the Federal Records Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

In addition, shortly after beginning to serve as Acting Secretary, I committed to publish all of my meetings with non-governmental parties on the Department’s website. By doing so, I am voluntarily providing more transparency than is legally required. In addition, I am committed to implementing best practices for transparency, and I am conducting a review of other Cabinet Agencies’ disclosure procedures. Once that review is complete, I may modify my practices.

Like you, I agree that the need for transparency is even more acute in our leaders. Frankly, I believe that all Federal public officials, including Members of Congress, should publicly disclose all meetings held with individuals or parties other than governmental entities, as I am already committed to doing. Given your recognition of the acute need for transparency, I encourage you in your new leadership role to join me in adopting this disclosure procedure. Together, our leadership on this issue will provide a good example.

Finally, the Department will work to make the requisite records appropriately available to the Committee staff as they are able to do so.

A similar reply is being sent to the cosigner of your letter, the Honorable TJ Cox, Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Natural Resources, U.S. House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Bernhardt", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Bernhardt
Acting Secretary of the Interior

cc:

Representative Rob Bishop
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives

Representative Louie Gohmert
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives