

National Indian Health Board



December 16, 2020

Re: Candidate for Secretary for the Department of the Interior

Dear President-Elect Biden:

On behalf of the National Indian Health Board (NIHB) and the 574 federally-recognized Tribes we serve, I write to advance the name Deb Haaland for Secretary for the Department of the Interior. Congresswoman Haaland possesses the unique mix of experience, skills and personal qualities that are necessary to lead the Department of the Interior. Congresswoman Haaland has experience successfully working with a wide variety of key stakeholders, including Tribal Nations, Tribally-led organizations, and Tribal subject matter experts. Her keen understanding of urban, rural and Tribal populations, track record of success in serving diverse populations, and groundswell of support from partners and peers, recommend her and speak to her ability to serve as the Department's Secretary.

Founded by the Tribes in 1972, NIHB is a 501(c) 3 not-for-profit, charitable organization providing health care and public health advocacy, facilitating Tribal budget consultation and providing timely policy information and capacity building assistance (among other services) to all Tribal governments. NIHB serves Tribal governments – both those that operate their own health care delivery systems through contracting and compacting, and those receiving health care directly from the Indian Health Service (IHS). In addition, NIHB serves as the voice of the Tribes while monitoring, analyzing, reporting on and responding to federal legislation, policy, law, and regulations.

The United States federal government assumed a duty to provide health services to Tribal Nations as part of treaties negotiated to secure land and peace from the Tribes. Those treaties, and the promises and duties pledged therein, have been affirmed by Supreme Court case law, legislation, and executive orders. Together, this body of law comprises the federal government's Trust Responsibility to all federally-recognized Tribes. The Trust Responsibility runs from the entire federal government to Tribal Nations.

As a part of that commitment, the United States government administers a series of programs through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), a subagency of the Department of the Interior. The BIA serves as the primary conduit through which the United States engages with Tribal Nations and is a valuable partner in assisting Tribes with a variety of issues ranging from workforce development, natural resource protection, and education. The BIA's wide reach into Indian



Country makes it critical that its leadership is knowledgeable about Indian Country and its challenges and opportunities.

We believe that the fulfillment of the Trust Responsibility also relies on ensuring that the leadership of the Department of the Interior is invested in our Tribal communities. A Secretary that is invested in our communities is an effective advocate for ensuring that the Department's resources are directed to our communities in a way that maximizes their effectiveness and respects Tribal sovereignty. It is also important to remember that the Department's reach into Indian Country is not just limited to the programs that fall under the purview of the BIA or similar programs. The Department also administers the National Park Service, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Geological Survey, and other programs that are dedicated to the preservation and protection of our lands and natural resources. We believe that Congresswoman Deb Haaland has the knowledge, experience, and commitment needed to lead the Department of the Interior and ensure that it remains committed to protecting Tribal sovereignty, our lands, and our natural resources.

Congresswoman Haaland exemplifies the education, experience, and personal qualifications needed to serve as the Secretary for the Department of the Interior. She currently serves as the representative for New Mexico's first district where she serves as Vice Chair of for the Committee on Natural Resources and Chair of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands. Her experience in Congress demonstrates a shining example of how she applies her experience, education and personal abilities in order to be an effective advocate for the American people and achieve measurable results.

She has been exceptionally productive during her time in Congress. In 2019, during her first year in office, her bills received more bipartisan co-sponsors than any other freshman member of Congress. Her bills also received more influential sponsors (such as chair or ranking member of the committee of interest) than any other freshman member of Congress. When compared to all members of the House, she had the most bills with a companion in the United States Senate.¹ During her time in the House, she has been a staunch advocate for a variety of issues, including expanding access to economic opportunities in Indian Country, strengthening Tribal sovereignty, expanding health care access for AI/AN veterans, addressing disparities in the COVID-19 response, addressing climate change, among others. Her success as a legislator demonstrates an ability to work with people from a variety of backgrounds and with often diverging interests. The ability to build coalitions is a necessary trait for any leader and we believe that Congresswoman Haaland is an exceptional example of how that ability can lead to success.

She is also a citizen of the Laguna Pueblo and has served her people in a variety of roles, ranging from Tribal administrator to the Chairwoman of the Laguna Development Corporation Board of Directors. In the latter position, she successfully advocated for the adoption of environmentally friendly policies and practices. She also started and ran her own small business. She received her

¹¹ See https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/debra_haaland/412800/report-card/2019

bachelor's and law degrees from the University of New Mexico. During her time as a law student, she participated in the Indian Law program and was active in the Native American Law Student Association (NALSA), moot court, and the Southwest Indian Law Clinic, where she had the opportunity to argue in Laguna Tribal court.

Congresswoman Haaland's many accomplishments and experiences demonstrate her exemplary ability to work with a variety of populations and build coalitions in order to advance policies and initiatives. They also demonstrate her deep commitment to Indian Country and the preservation of our lands and natural resources. The National Indian Health Board stands ready to work with the Administration to ensure the Department of the Interior has the leadership needed to continue its critically important work.

Please do not hesitate to contact the National Indian Health Board. The Chief Executive Officer, Stacy A. Bohlen, can be reached at sbohlen@nihb.org or 202-680-2800.

Yours in Health,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "W" and "S".

William Smith
Acting Chairman
National Indian Health Board