

**To:** Interested Parties

**From:** Hannah Ledford (APL) & Julia Alschuler (CDP)

**Re:** Proposed Zinke-Bernhardt Coordinated Accountability Plan

**Date:** July 12, 2018

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## **INTRODUCTION**

While Ryan Zinke poses a threat to the public lands and waters he is charged with protecting, he is also a largely ineffectual cabinet secretary who has managed to rack up an impressive record of scandal as well as sloppily handled administrative actions in his short tenure at DOI.

Conversely, the deputy secretary, David Bernhardt, is a longtime DC-insider who knows how to fly under the radar and move things through DOI.

While press attention has largely been focused on Zinke and will likely stay that way, we believe that a two-prong effort to amplify Zinke's scandals and ensure that Bernhardt starts to share in them will help slow, stop or weaken their agenda at DOI. To start, this will be accomplished through more robust coordination on all efforts pertaining to Zinke (research, messaging, media outreach, hill outreach, amplification, etc.), and increased research capacity focused on Bernhardt.

The coordinated efforts led by APL and CDP will not be a public facing campaign calling on Zinke to resign although we hope groups pursuing these tactics will participate in our coordination efforts. Instead, we will endeavor to coordinate the conservation, public lands, wildlife, oceans and larger progressive community, including our champs on the Hill, around the objectives and strategies listed below.

## **OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES**

**Objective 1: Slow, stop or weaken Zinke's ability to move his agenda through DOI.** This objective will have two strategies:

- DC/national strategy (national Green Groups): Undermine Zinke's credibility by making him a high-profile, controversial figure inside the beltway and nationally, and a persistent headache for the administration, driving a wedge between him and Trump
  - Tactics:
    - Increase media scrutiny toward Zinke
    - Push reporters to do independent digging
    - Increase negative media coverage of Zinke in national right-leaning/conservative media
    - Look for DC-based birddogging opportunities
- Target state strategy (local partners): Undermine Zinke's credibility and policies in target states, making his agenda a political liability for elected officials and driving a wedge between them and Zinke:
  - Tactics:
    - Localize bad DOI policies by identifying and amplifying local impact stories
      - Immediate opportunity for synergy is APL's Public Lands Protection Campaign

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- Will identify opportunities for offshore collaboration
- Generate state-based controversy
  - Partner with local organizations and voices that are persuasive to congressional targets to amplify negative media coverage to ensure that target electeds and their staffs see it
  - Increase negative press coverage of Zinke in local right-leaning/conservative media
  - Identify birddogging opportunities

## **Objective 2: Bernhardt leaves DOI**

- Strategy: Drive a wedge between Bernhardt and the people he needs the most now and in the future: Zinke, DC lobbying firms, and oil/gas/mining companies by:
  - Increasing research capacity focused on Bernhardt
  - Increasing media scrutiny on Bernhardt (dependent on research findings)
  - Exploring creative amplification tactics (dependent on research findings)

## **TACTICS:**

Achieving the objectives and strategies in this plan would be accomplished through the execution of the tactics listed below. After launching this campaign **our first steps will be to expand this section to include a more specific campaign calendar.**

- Research generation and FOIA coordination
- Communications/messaging coordination
- Press outreach/pitching coordination
- Paid communications (pending additional resources)
- Social amplification
- Field coordination
- Hill coordination to ensure fast amplification of press, and to potentially coordinate on oversight and investigations

## **WAYS TO ENGAGE:**

- ✓ Listserv/weekly call participation
- ✓ Increased digital amplification of Zinke scandals
- ✓ Integrate messaging across existing work/campaigns
- ✓ Staff support for press outreach and FOI/research collaboration
- ✓ Engage Hill champs with oversight responsibilities to call for investigations

## **MESSAGING GUIDANCE**

APL will conduct a poll to determine which messages are most convincing in terms of undermining Zinke's credibility, with a specific eye toward identifying nuances in messaging in

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our target states. The guidance below will be updated when results and recommendations from that poll are finalized.

### **Secretary Zinke's Interior Department: Suggested Topline Messages**

*Note: this is a living document and will be updated as developments occur.*

**Secretary Zinke and his dirty deputies are corrupt DC-insiders. Secretary Zinke has made his greed and political ambitions obvious, and he and his cronies are using the Department of Interior as a stepping stone to increase their fame and fortune, and to climb the political ladder.**

**America is paying the price for Secretary Zinke's scheme to sell out America's public lands to wealthy corporations and campaign donors. Secretary Zinke and his dirty deputies are the most anti-park and anti-conservation in the Department of the Interior's history.**

**# # #**

**Secretary Zinke is just another corrupt DC-insider. He has made his blind political ambitions obvious, and is using the Department of Interior as a stepping stone to increase his own fame, fortune and to climb the political ladder.**

- **Scandal:** Under Secretary Zinke, the Interior Department has become embroiled in unprecedented levels of scandal. Serious questions have been raised by government investigators about his use of private airplanes, his constant mixing of official and political business, his controversial decision to reassign high-level Interior employees, his role in shady political action committees — the list goes on.
- **Suspicious Activity:** Zinke is now the subject of **14 federal investigations**. As evidenced by the following, he has proven that he has neither regard or respect for ethics, nor our federal institutions:
  - [Politico recently reported](#) that a foundation established by Zinke and headed by his wife is playing a key role in a real-estate deal supported by the chairman of Halliburton, an oil-services company. This is a flagrant conflict of interest given Halliburton stands to benefit when the Department of Interior decides to open public lands for oil exploration or drilling. DOI's Inspector General has [opened an official inquiry](#) into this unmistakable conflict of interest. Watchdog groups and congressional Democrats are [calling](#) for a full investigation.
  - Earlier this year, the Interior Department's internal watchdog criticized Zinke for obscuring his personal interest in some ostensibly official duties — an incident that involved another Whitefish resident, Fidelity National Financial Chairman Bill Foley, who was one of Zinke's biggest political donors. Zinke has two political action committees SEAL PAC and Special Operations for America - both of which are essentially slush funds to pay political consultants, pay business associates and accept campaign contributions.
  - Zinke's [use of private email](#) for official business raises a red flag on his mismanagement of the department. The fact that it would take an outside review of his email account to learn what other questionable behavior he might be hiding

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- shows a complete lack of concern for transparency or accountability to the American public.
- Zinke has no problem looking the other way [when Deputy David Bernhardt cozies up](#) to Trump donors and lobbyists to influence decisions about casinos and sagebrush conservation. Despite signing an ethics agreement, Bernhardt's actions kick the door open to some egregious conflicts of interest and ethics violations.
- **Blind Ambition:** Secretary Zinke's blind political ambition infects virtually every action he's taking at the Interior Department. He gives special treatment to Montana — a place he's widely rumored to run for governor — while carrying water for oil and mining interests in the other 49 states, who might one day finance his future campaigns.
  - **Pay to Play?** Throughout his tenure at the Interior Department, Zinke has met with a number of Republican donors and attended GOP fundraisers during taxpayer-funded trips.
  - **Zinke for Sale -** A foundation established by Zinke and headed by his wife is playing a key role in a real-estate deal supported by the chairman of Halliburton, an oil-services company. This is a flagrant conflict of interest given Halliburton stands to benefit when the Department of Interior decides to open public lands for oil exploration or drilling.
  - **Zinke for President?** The Des Moines Register reported that a polling firm floated Zinke's name among Iowa Republican voters to gauge his popularity for a presidential bid.
- **Zinke First, America Last:** Secretary Zinke's top priority is Secretary Zinke. Since taking his position in the cabinet, he's never met a camera he didn't like and has made it clear that his priorities are building his brand and cultivating name recognition to run for higher office.
  - He's staged obvious and self-serving photo ops since literally day one, riding a horse to Department of Interior on his first day of work.
  - He required a special flag be flown when he was in the office in D.C.
  - Zinke also did a photoshoot for GQ that ran in the magazine with the headline, "Ryan Zinke, Trump's Cowboy Enforcer, is Ready for his Close-up." If that's not the self-serving PR of a politician looking to build his brand, what is?
  - Secretary Zinke has also made frequent appearances on Fox News, not to discuss anything within the jurisdiction of the Department of Interior, but rather to discuss issues totally out of his department's purview such as the North Korean denuclearization negotiations.
- **Wasteful and Embarrassing Spending:** Maintaining his pattern of putting himself first, Secretary Zinke has taken every opportunity to take advantage of American taxpayers. So far, his spending spree has included:
  - A private plane Zinke took to the U.S. Virgin Islands
  - Private helicopter rides to beat traffic around D.C.
  - \$139,000 for office door upgrades

**America is paying the price for Secretary Zinke's scheme to sell out America's public lands to the highest bidder. Secretary Zinke is the most anti-park and anti-conservation Interior Secretary in history.**

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- **Hurting the Lands:** Secretary Zinke has pushed through the [largest elimination of protected land](#) and waters in U.S. history, advising President Trump to erase 2 million acres from Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments
- **Hurting the Waters:** Secretary Zinke has [opened up 90 percent of U.S. coastal waters](#) to oil drilling, putting coastal communities and America's beaches at risk of catastrophic oil spills. He even pushed President Trump to [open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge](#)—one of America's last intact landscapes—to industrial oil drilling.
- **Oil Drilling on OUR Land:** The secretary has offered nearly 12 million acres of public land for industrial oil development, [selling off lands](#) next to national parks, national monuments, and national historical sites—a move that could threaten rural Western communities and the growing [\\$887 billion outdoor recreation](#) economy.
- **Who's in Charge?** Secretary Zinke has given unprecedented deference to industrial interests, [eliminating common sense safeguards](#) placed on oil and gas companies at the expense of local communities, water supplies, wildlife habitat, recreation areas, and the outdoor economy.
- **Koch & NRA vs. Trump?** An [investigative report](#) on Zinke's travel shows that he lied to federal investigators and misled the public about the official purpose of a trip to Nevada, wasting taxpayer money to serve his own political interests by dining with NRA and Koch Industries lobbyists, blatantly putting the special interests and campaign donors before the American people and the lands and wildlife he is meant to protect.