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## Here's why progressives are so excited about Biden's historic Cabinet pick Deb Haaland



Congresswoman Deb Haaland (D-New Mexico) talks with Col. Richard Gibbs, 377th Air Base Wing commander, and Kirtland leadership during a visit to Kirtland Air Force Base Feb. 5, 2019. Haaland attended a briefing and visited key base locations during her visit. (U.S. Air Force photo by Jessie Perkins.)

Kenny Stancil and Common Dreams December 17, 2020

President-elect Joe Biden's nomination of Democratic Rep. Deb Haaland to be secretary of the interior—the successful culmination of a campaign waged by a broad coalition of social and environmental justice advocates—was met with applause on Thursday.

Climate justice and Indigenous rights advocates commended the decision to put the progressive Native American congresswoman from New Mexico in charge of the department overseeing

500 million acres of federal land—calling the move promising for the responsible development of clean energy infrastructure and for the reversal of the fossil fuel industry's harmful legacy of extraction and pollution on land belonging to the U.S. public and tribal nations.

"This is a big deal," tweeted Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.).



Anna Peterson, executive director of The Mountain Pact, an organization that works with local elected officials across the West on federal climate and public lands policies, said in a statement that "for the last four years the Department of Interior has sold off America's public lands and natural resources to Secretary Bernhardt and [Bureau of Land Management defacto director] William Perry Pendley's friends and former clients while draining the agencies of their experienced staff."

"Our country is lucky," Peterson added, saying that Haaland would "be able to correct so many wrongdoings from the Trump administration."

Haaland—a member of the Pueblo of Laguna tribe who co-chairs the Native American Caucus and has represented New Mexico's 1st congressional district since 2019—has been a strong voice on the House Natural Resources Committee. The Democratic lawmaker is also leading congressional efforts to accomplish the goals set forth in the Thirty by Thirty Resolution to conserve at least 30% of the ocean and 30% of the land within the U.S. by 2030.

Varshini Prakash, co-founder and executive director of the Sunrise Movement, called Haaland "a perfect choice."

Haaland "is a fierce ally of our movement who has fought for renewable energy job creation in the House and was one of the first congressmembers to endorse the vision for a Green New Deal," Prakash added. "With a progressive leader at the helm, we can make real progress on stopping climate change and ensure sovereignty and dignity for all native people and justice for all."

The nomination also elicited praise from Western Values Project director Jayson O'Neill who said that "Haaland has the experience to make sure our public lands are part of the solution and knowledge to unravel the special interests' tentacles controlling the department."

Nikki Pitre, executive director of the Center for Native American Youth, called Haaland's nomination "historic, groundbreaking, and a proud moment for Indian country," adding that the congresswoman can "chart a new path forward between the United States government and Indigenous communities."

"Haaland will be the first Native American to serve as secretary of the interior, which controls federal lands and has a history of exploiting Indigenous people and displacing tribal communities," said Lori Lodes, executive director of Climate Power 2020. "As secretary of the interior, Haaland will be on the frontlines of addressing the climate crisis and protecting our land, air, and water from polluters."

Fossil Free Media director Jamie Henn called the nomination "absolutely tremendous news for Indigenous rights and our fight for climate justice"—struggles that Haaland has called inseparable because "tribal nations across the country... are battling the fossil fuel industry in their backyards."



"There will be lots of work to undo Trump's toxic, anti-public lands legacy," O'Neill noted.

Food and Water Watch policy director Mitch Jones joined the chorus of praise, pointing out that "hundreds of progressive organizations and climate activist groups have rallied to support Deb Haaland as the next interior secretary because she has the record and the expertise to protect our public lands."

"Most importantly," Jones added, "Haaland has been clear about her commitment to ending the exploitation of public lands by fossil fuel corporations, which over the last four years were given a green light to pollute and profiteer off of land that should be managed in the public interest."