

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 10, 2016

Phyllis K. Fong
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Room 117-W Jamie Whitten Building
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Ms. Fong:

We write to urge you to conduct an audit into the U.S. Forest Service's (FS) revised sexual misconduct procedures to ensure that (1) there are adequate processes in place to report sexual misconduct, (2) survivors and whistleblowers are protected from retaliation, (3) perpetrators found to have engaged in sexual misconduct and supervisors who have not properly implemented FS procedures are held accountable, and (4) the agency has improved its workplace environment. As you know, there have been past complaints from female firefighters and other FS employees that outline detailed allegations of continued hostile work environments, gender discrimination, and administrative barriers to reporting misconduct.

In November of 2014, Congresswoman Speier sent a letter requesting an investigation of allegations of sexual misconduct and retaliation in Region 5 of the FS. In response, you initiated a preliminary review that found that "the Forest Service is making progress and is focused on improving the environment of its workplace." At the time, you estimated that the FS would complete implementation of its new procedures by the end of Fiscal Year 2015, and stated that you would continue to monitor the FS's procedural improvements. It has been approximately one year since the FS adopted its new procedures and we believe it is imperative that you audit these policies to ensure they have addressed the deficiencies they sought to improve.

In addition, given the recent findings of rampant sexual harassment in the Department of the Interior National Park Service, now is an appropriate time to consider whether the Forest Service's improvements have succeeded in improving the workplace environment. If the new procedures implemented by the FS have been successful, they may serve as a model for other federal agencies. If the new procedures have not been successful, it is critical that they be modified as soon as possible. However, only a careful investigation can determine what has worked and what still needs to be improved.

The isolated nature of work in remote and backcountry environments makes employees particularly vulnerable to harassment and abuse when the proper reporting mechanisms are not in place. The FS must have adequate and fair processes for reporting sexual misconduct and gender discrimination, handle complaints in a timely manner in accordance with appropriate policies, and follow appropriate protocols to discipline employees that contribute to a hostile work environment.

We thank you for the work done on the investigation and urge you to immediately audit the FS's revised sexual misconduct procedures to determine if the procedures put in place are now sufficient. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Jackie Speier
Member of Congress



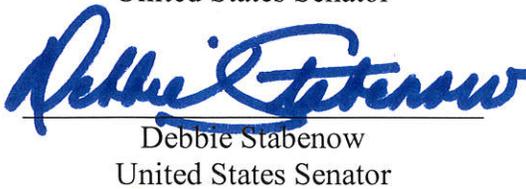
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



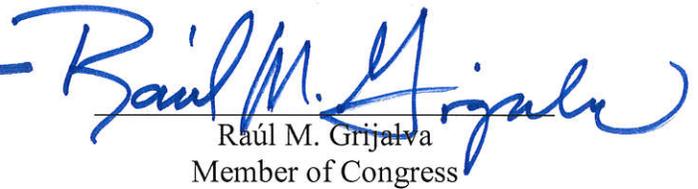
Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



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United States Senator



Raúl M. Grijalva
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Jason Chaffetz
Member of Congress



Elijah Cummings
Member of Congress



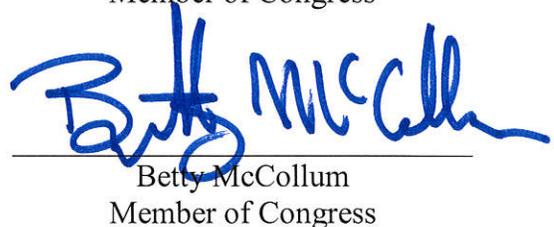
Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress



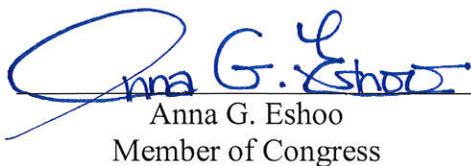
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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress