

October 2024

# Misconduct, Malfeasance, and Double Standards

The Real Story of the "Most Ethical and Transparent  
Administration in History"



PROTECT *the*  
PUBLIC'S TRUST

---



# Table of Contents

01

**Introduction**

02

**White House**

Office of White House Counsel (WHCO), The White House and National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Jen Psaki, The White House and Small Business Administration (SBA)

06

**Health and Human Services (HHS)**

Rachel Levine, Dr. Anthony Fauci/David Morens, Vivek Murthy, Dr. Anthony Fauci, Dr. Francis Collins, Kathy Crosby

10

**Department of the Interior (DOI)**

Deborah Haaland, Tracy Stone-Manning, Elizabeth Klein, Laura Daniel-Davis, Nada Culver, Daniel Cordalis, Robert Anderson

15

**Department of Energy (DOE)**

Jennifer Granholm, Kelly Speakes-Backman

17

**Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**

Joseph Goffman, Melissa Hoffer, David Hayes, David Batson

20

**Department of Education (ED)**

Miguel Cardona, Donna Harris-Aikens

22

**Department of Commerce (DOC)**

Gina Raimondo

23

**Department of State**

John Kerry

24

**Other Complaints**

Jen Easterly, Stacy Dean, Ann Carlson

26

**Conclusion**



# Introduction

Any experienced professional will tell you that maintaining the public's trust is of the utmost importance. The public's trust is what allows businesses to prosper, gives nonprofits the ability to serve their communities, and lends the government legitimacy in its role in our lives. This last is crucial, especially in our system of government. As the size and scope of government have increased, maintaining the public's trust is more important than ever.



[From its onset](#), the Biden-Harris administration promised to “bring transparency and truth back to government,” per then-White House press secretary Jen Psaki. [Psaki also claimed](#) that President Joe Biden “is committed to ensuring we have the most ethically vigorous administration in history.” However, the administration and its executive branch agencies have often failed to live up to these high ideals, and the myth of a scandal-free administration is just that: a myth.

Over the last several years, Americans have also seen a media double-standard for certain officials, especially when it comes to ethical standards. But the double-standard is not just within the media — government watchdogs, organizations who promise government accountability to the American people, have been every bit as culpable. The biggest names in the game who made it a point to go after the Trump administration over ethics violations have gone mum under the Biden-Harris administration. Then, to make matters worse, Americans witnessed leaders from special interest groups, cherry-picked by the Biden-Harris administration, placed into influential positions of power from which they failed to live up to the [expectations](#) of and [obligations to](#) the [American public](#).

The public's trust in government is at [a perilous low](#) because citizens are aware of a chasm between what officials are telling them and what they see with their own eyes. In the face of the media and watchdog double standard, Protect the Public's Trust (PPT) has worked diligently to expose the possible misconduct and potential conflicts riddling the executive branch. From the Bureau of Land Management to the Department of Energy, PPT has shone light on the parts of the government that the legacy media and special interest groups don't want you to see.

PPT wholeheartedly subscribes to the notion that sunlight is the best disinfectant. This report paints a dour portrait of the administration's promise to “return the country to normalcy” and become the most ethical and transparent administration in history. Instead, as our myriad complaints demonstrate, the effect has been an undermining of public trust and discarding of traditional norms of behavior. The agency-by-agency documented examples of violations of the public trust and rampant prioritization of special interest agendas only heighten the need for genuine watchdogs to continue keeping guard.

And we intend to do just that.



# White House

We begin our story at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

The White House should be a symbol of American virtue and good governance. The white paint coating the building symbolizes the importance of remaining true in the mission of the presidency: to lead the American people.

Contrary to the narrative, it appears that the Biden-Harris White House has followed a different path. A number of alleged violations of ethics obligations have occurred that have abased the trust placed in them by the American people.

## Office of White House Counsel (WHCO)

The ethical and national security ramifications of President Biden's retention of classified documents in his various unsecured homes ignited a media firestorm.

In January 2023, after the story broke, PPT [filed a complaint](#) with federal ethics officials alleging that taxpayer dollars may have been inappropriately misused and conflicts of interest potentially created by senior White House attorneys getting involved in President Biden's [personal legal matter](#). Special Counsel to the President Richard Sauber said on record that he had been [personally involved](#) in the case since the first batch of documents were discovered and, in a statement, said that he "went to Wilmington Thursday evening to facilitate providing the document the President's personal counsel found on Wednesday to the Justice Department."

While the president is entitled to legal representation as all Americans are, the White House Counsel's Office are not his personal attorneys and should not be treated as such. Yet, in that instance, the WHCO appeared to be acting as Joe Biden's personal lawyers and not President Biden's official attorneys. The WHCO's actions raise many legal questions, including who the WHCO's client is in the matter.

Additionally, the WHCO's involvement could create deep conflicts of interest. As the documents almost certainly came into Joe Biden's possession while he was vice president, it suggests that the presidency or WHCO took a lax approach to security protocols at the end of the Obama administration or then-Vice President Biden violated the protocols.

In either case, the WHCO is not the entity that should be representing Joe Biden in his legal matters.



## The White House and National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

The rise and fall of Sam Bankman-Fried, the disgraced former CEO behind cryptocurrency exchange FTX, will forever be a business school case study. Political science schools, however, will learn about the alleged "backchannel" between a Democratic operative linked to Bankman-Fried and Biden-Harris administration officials.

In [January 2023](#), PPT called for National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) ethics officials to investigate [private "backchannel" Slack communications](#) between Biden-Harris administration officials and political operative Sean McElwee and his firm Data For Progress regarding potential Presidential Records Act (PRA) and Federal Records Act (FRA) violations. The complaint arose after media reports detailed the Slack channel involving administration officials and McElwee, who was working on behalf of Bankman-Fried and was known to have "easy access to the White House," and speculation that he was helping as part of a strategy to prevent government oversight of cryptocurrency.



This “backchannel” between the Biden-Harris administration officials and McElwee could have allowed for sidestepping federal laws governing official communications and McElwee reportedly closed the channel after Bankman-Fried’s indictment, hiding the messages from the public. Regardless, federal officials participating in a backchannel violates basic ethical norms, let alone the Biden-Harris administration’s ethics pledge.

Backchannels are nothing new for the Biden-Harris administration — the “Twitter Files” revealed backchannels between the administration and social media companies to monitor Americans’ free speech for the ever-subjective “misinformation.” Furthermore, these examples may be indicators of a culture of avoiding transparency and the preservation of public documents among Biden-Harris administration officials, in stark contrast to the administration’s promises to the American public.

Ethics do not appear to have been top-of-mind in the Biden-Harris administration’s relationship with FTX. PPT found documents in December 2022 detailing how FTX executives “[wined and dined](#)” then-commissioner at the Commodity Futures Trading Commission Dan Berkovitz. Berkovitz [resigned](#) from his federal employment after the documents came to light.

Americans deserve better from their public officials than secret backchannels that are deleted after an indictment. However, NARA expressed its disturbing lack of [concern](#) with possible breaches of the PRA when it responded to these potential violations by merely accepting the White House’s assertion that they had instructed employees in PRA.

## Jen Psaki, Former White House Press Secretary

Speaking for the President of the United States is a critical role in our nation’s governance and requires someone with unbending adherence to ethical standards. Then, the Biden-Harris administration [tapped Jen Psaki](#).



PPT filed an [ethics complaint](#) against Psaki in April 2022 after reports surfaced that she would be leaving the Biden-Harris administration to take a role at a major media outlet.

Even amid the negotiations and a reported bidding war for her services, Psaki continued to take questions and engage with representatives from her prospective employers from the White House podium.

Additionally, Psaki appeared on Pod Save America, a left-leaning political podcast, and bashed Fox News — a major competitor to MSNBC, the network that now hosts Psaki’s show. Psaki’s comments came before she announced her move to MSNBC, while she was still press secretary for President Biden. Psaki had been introduced on the podcast by her official title as White House press secretary and took questions relating to her official duties.

Psaki was also asked about Fox News correspondent Peter Doocy, to which she said, “He works for a network that provides people with questions that, nothing personal to any individual including Peter Doocy, but might make anyone sound like a stupid son of a b\*\*\*h.”

Psaki’s apparent conflict of interest while looking to leave federal service for a high-salary television job is not how the White House instills confidence with the American people.



## **Karine Jean-Pierre, White House Press Secretary; Andrew Bates, Deputy White House Press Secretary**

After Psaki left the Biden-Harris administration for MSNBC in 2022, the administration had the opportunity to choose a presidential spokesperson who would embody the ethical standards required for the position and not violate basic federal ethics statutes like the Hatch Act.

Instead, it hired [Karine Jean-Pierre](#).

KJP, as she is called, often invokes the Hatch Act to avoid answering uncomfortable questions. Yet her adherence to the law prohibiting federal employees from using their offices to engage in partisan politicking is quite inconsistent. In early November 2022, a week before the midterm elections that year, PPT [filed an ethics complaint](#) against Jean-Pierre regarding ethically dubious statements she made during a White House press briefing. In the briefing, Jean-Pierre repeatedly disparaged so-called “mega MAGA Republicans” — which PPT believed to be a violation of the Hatch Act.

“Unfortunately, we have seen mega MAGA Republican officials who don’t believe in the rule of law,” Jean-Pierre said. “They refuse to accept the results of free and fair elections, and they fan the flames of political violence through what they praise and what they refuse to condemn.” Jean-Pierre’s statements came on the heels of Hatch Act violations by her predecessor Jen Psaki as well as White House chief of staff Ron Klain.

Jump to [June 2023](#). The OSC investigation sparked by PPT’s November 2022 complaint concluded Jean-Pierre had indeed violated the Hatch Act. OSC followed up with guidance urging federal employees against using campaign slogans at work. Rather than showing contrition, Jean-Pierre and her subordinate, Deputy Press Secretary Andrew Bates, doubled down. Within days, each of them issued official statements with frequent uses of the term “MAGA Republicans.”

PPT [responded with another complaint](#) to OSC. In response, Jean-Pierre, for a second time, and Bates were found by OSC [to have violated](#) the Hatch Act later in 2023. Neither faced any consequences, however.

## **The White House and Small Business Administration (SBA)**

Unfortunately, disregard for the Hatch Act seems to be widespread in the administration, even the SBA.

PPT filed an [ethics complaint](#) against the SBA and the White House in [April 2024](#) asking the Office of Special Counsel (OSC) to investigate another apparent Hatch Act violation we found in FOIA-obtained documents.

When former President Trump announced his intention to run for president again in November 2022, OSC [expressly warned](#) federal employees against using campaign slogans, specifically “MAGA,” while conducting official duties. OSC has also made it clear since 2015 that federal emails sharing campaign slogans constitute violations of the Hatch Act. PPT, however, discovered several instances of these kinds of emails being sent at the White House and SBA.

One White House email was titled “Talking Points: House Republican MAGA Economic Plan” and told recipients to “find talking points below on the President’s veto of the extreme MAGA Republican bill” as well as to feel “free to deploy now to your respective universes.” Another White House email was titled “Talking Points: President Biden’s Veto of Extreme MAGA Republican Bill” and shared internally by two SBA staffers.

The blatant politicking on the taxpayers dime only further illustrates why the decay of trust Americans have in our federal government continues.



## White House

From the biggest moments to the smallest tweets, presidential records are critical for the history of our nation. PPT understands this and took action when the Biden-Harris administration tried to improperly delete a published statement.

Early in November 2022, PPT [called](#) on NARA to [investigate](#) a possible violation of the Presidential Records Act (PRA) by the Biden-Harris administration when the White House deleted a tweet from its official Twitter, now X, account after the platform provided further context to the information in the tweet. The deletion of the tweet may have run afoul of the PRA.

On November 1, 2022, the White House tweeted on its official account, "Seniors are getting the biggest increase in their Social Security checks in 10 years through President Biden's leadership." Twitter added context to the tweet noting that the Social Security increase was tied to the inflation rate, per a 1972 law. The inflation rate hit a 40-year high under the Biden-Harris administration. Two days later, the White House deleted the tweet.

PRA amendments passed in 1978 allow for the disposal of records that "no longer have administrative, historical, informational, or evidentiary value" by an incumbent president, "once the views of the Archivist of the United States on the proposed disposal have been obtained in writing." Personal records are exempt from the preservation requirements, but the November 1 tweet is a public statement and would be subject to PRA destruction protocols.

Additionally, the administration's claims of the tweet being "not complete" or lacking proper "context" raise serious questions as to whether proper conduct was followed or if the tweet was deleted to limit embarrassment for the Biden-Harris administration.

Regardless of reasoning, trying to hide presidential records does not maintain the public's trust in the White House.

Nor does NARA engender an abundance of trust as its probe of such behavior consisted of simply asking the White House if it complies with the PRA.



# Health and Human Services (HHS)

HHS's mission requires immense amounts of public trust that is easily squandered. No federal agency has been front and center like the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). And no agency has lost so much credibility during the Biden-Harris administration.

As it took the reins amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Biden-Harris HHS disregarded ethical and scientific integrity principles as it issued far-reaching recommendations governing nearly every aspect of Americans' lives. PPT exposed a number of potential violations and filed several complaints against appointees in the department and its component agencies to help preserve what little remains of the public's trust.



## Admiral Rachel Levine, Assistant Secretary for Health (ASH)

One of the most contentious health care issues emerging in the last few years is the use of "gender-affirming care" for minors. An assistant secretary for health [Admiral Rachel Levine](#) has emerged as one of the most high-profile proponents of these treatments. Levine issued many public statements claiming they are "medically necessary, safe and effective." The Assistant Secretary said on-record that there "is no argument among medical professionals — pediatricians, pediatric endocrinologists, adolescent medicine physicians, psychologists, et cetera — about the value and the importance of gender-affirming care."

And, if one questions Levine's claims, it is, in Levine's words, "unconscionable" and "ideologically and politically motivated."

PPT submitted a FOIA seeking "records of scientific evidence, studies, and/or data to support the Assistant Secretary's claim that gender-affirming care is medically necessary, safe, and effective for trans and non-binary youth." Additionally, PPT requested "records of surveys of medical professionals regarding the value and importance of 'gender-affirming care' for minor children."

A lawsuit was required for HHS to turn over any records to back up Levine's claims. The only record returned was a two-page information sheet publicly available on HHS's website. After receipt of these records showing the razor-thin backing of Levine's statements on "gender-affirming care," PPT [filed a scientific integrity complaint](#) with the department in February 2024.

## Dr. Anthony Fauci/David Morens, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

There's a certain poetic justice in a public official worried about having a smoking gun in emails ending up leaving entire batteries of still-hot howitzers around. Witness one of Dr. Anthony Fauci's top advisors: Dr. David Morens.

In June 2024, PPT [formally requested](#) that the HHS Inspector General open an investigation into Morens and his colleagues at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and NIAID regarding their apparently deliberate efforts to hide information from the public between April 2020 and at least December 2021, during the height of the COVID pandemic. Morens encouraged NIH and NIAID employees to use their personal email accounts to communicate with one-another to avoid Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) disclosures and seemed to practice what he preached.





One official even went as far as to spell words incorrectly to impair FOIA word searches.

[Emails published](#) by the House Select Subcommittee on the COVID-19 Pandemic revealed that Morens began using his private email account in April 2020 and even told his colleague, Dr. Gerald Keusch, to send “nothing” to him except to his private email account. He also told his colleagues that “Tony” (presumably Dr. Fauci) could only be reached through his personal email, as well.

Fast-forward to February 2021 and Morens told his colleagues that the NIH/NIAID “foia lady” — an “old friend, Marg [Margaret] Moore, who heads [their] FOIA office and also hates FOIAs” — told him how to “make emails disappear” after he was hit with a request “but before the search starts.” Another email boasts that, “with the help of [his] IT folks,” his personal email account “is now safe from FOIA.” Morens even clarified in a follow-up email that both his email and phone calls were “now safe and that text messages were NOT, as it can be FOIA’d (sic)” like his government email.

All of this comes on the heels of an email Morens sent to colleagues in June 2020 reading, “We are all smart enough to know to never have smoking guns, and if we did we wouldn’t put them in emails and if we found them we’d delete them.” Additionally, in an October 2021 email, Morens wrote, “I deleted that email but I now learn that every email I ever [sic] got since 1998 is captured and will be turned over, whether or not I instantly deleted it.”

And the public recently learned that Ms. Moore, the “FOIA lady” planned to invoke her Fifth Amendment rights in response to a House committee subpoena.

## Vivek Murthy, Surgeon General

School closures and student quarantining enacted as part of the COVID-19 lockdowns set back student achievement levels by two decades according to some estimates. The physical, social-emotional, and mental health damage students suffered were profound and potentially long-lasting.



Parents who understood the harm of school closure and quarantine policies were told by officials like U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy that they were the only way to keep their kids safe. What science, if any, supported these actions?

In June 2024, PPT [filed a complaint](#) with HHS on Murthy’s August 2021 guidance to Education Secretary Miguel Cardona regarding “physical distancing” to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools. Murthy specifically said that, if “students maintain 3-6 feet of social distancing and are not within 3 feet of a person who has tested positive for more than 15 minutes then they do not need to quarantine.”

[PPT submitted](#) a FOIA request for the evidence backing Murthy’s guidance but we received only a 33-page report titled, “Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention.”

None of the evidence presented in the report supported Murthy’s social distancing claims.

In fact, the five studies cited in the report did not look at social distancing’s effectiveness in isolation nor did they attempt to study the correct distance to avoid spreading COVID-19. One study looked at a different virus “in a hospital setting,” not a school setting. Another pushed a different claim from a non-peer reviewed opinion piece from the Journal of the American Medical Association.



Another study measured a variety of social distancing lengths with inconsistent results. A different study either didn't address social distancing, did not provide an optimal distance, or threw water on Murthy's claims.

Social distancing proved futile in attempting to determine who was exposed to the virus. Worse, quarantining students was similar to out-of-school suspensions (which the educational establishment abhors), but for no other reason than being exposed to a virus, outside of their control.

The only thing worse than the mistrust our public health officials inspired during the pandemic is the damage their actions did to school kids. Federal health officials issued recommendations that resulted in students being held out of schools, causing severe and long-lasting harm, all the while hoping nobody noticed the slapdash evidence they offered in support.

### **Dr. Anthony Fauci, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Director**

If there is one name synonymous with COVID-19, it is Dr. Anthony Fauci. While a venerated figure in the eyes of some, other Americans see him as a symbol of an arrogant public health establishment that imposed draconian policies with little scientific support and squandered public trust built up over decades.

It appears that Fauci exploited his high-profile status to inject himself into election-year politics — even possibly violating federal law. In June 2021, PPT urged the Office of Special Counsel to investigate statements made by Fauci that seemed to cross the line into political speech and violate the Hatch Act.

In a [Washington Post interview](#) just days before the 2020 presidential election, Fauci gave an evaluation of the two candidates' approaches to battling the pandemic, advocating in favor of the approach of then-candidate Joe Biden ("taking it seriously from a public health perspective") and against then-sitting President Trump ("looking at it from a different perspective").

OSC commenced an investigation of Dr. Fauci in response to PPT's complaint. Investigators declared the case a "close call" while determining the official much esteemed by career bureaucrats did not violate the Hatch Act.

### **Dr. Francis Collins, former Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and former Science Advisor to President Biden**

Dr. Francis Collins was another prominent figure in public health leadership as it suffered its precipitous decline in trust. One particular incident exemplified behavior that contributed to this decay at NIH and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

In October 2021, PPT requested that [HHS investigate](#) apparent violations of the two agencies' scientific integrity policies by senior officials. The allegations noted that, on multiple occasions, the NIH and CDC misrepresented a study's results on the CDC website and in public.

In [August 2021](#), the CDC issued a press release misrepresenting the findings of a Kentucky study purportedly about the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine. The press release's headline lauded the study's finding of vaccination as offering "higher protection" than that gained by previous COVID-19 infections. The release itself stated that the study's "data further indicate that COVID-19 vaccines offer better protection than natural immunity alone." Collins cited the Kentucky study several days later during an interview with Fox News' Bret Baier while claiming to viewers that the vaccine provides better protection from COVID-19 than natural antibodies.

However, a comparison between the protection provided by COVID vaccines and prior infection was not even what the study investigated. An epidemiologist from Harvard later declared that Collins was "misleading the public" with his statements and that he "falsely claims less reinfections after vaccines than after COVID disease." Another medical professor called Collins' claim "frustrating."



The misrepresentations of this study by CDC and NIH and officials within these agencies constituted merely another nail in the coffin of the American public's trust in these agencies.



### **Kathy Crosby, former Director of Health Communication and Education at FDA's Center for Tobacco Products**

Public officials are rightly under scrutiny because of the power, influence, opportunities, and wealth that can present themselves to people in their positions. Leveraging positions for "perks" is forbidden. But, still, it can happen.

One possible example is that of [Kathy Crosby](#), the former Director of Health Communication and Education at the CTP. PPT [lodged an ethics complaint](#) against Crosby in June 2024 after media reports surfaced showing her solicitation of an invitation for an annual awards gala hosted by the Center for Tobacco-Free Kids (CTFK) in April 2023. Crosby, an influential official in the federal government's regulation of tobacco products, appeared to solicit an invite in her official capacity to CTFK's annual gala, which cost \$400 per ticket for the 2024 event.

Crosby had been offered a complimentary ticket by CTFK to the 2022 gala but had been unable to attend. When she had not received an invitation to the 2023 event, she reached out to CTFK in an apparent effort to solicit an invitation. While media reports indicated she had ethics officials' approval to attend the 2023 gala, the FDA's response did not appear to address the accusations of solicitation for the ticket. Crosby seemed to make the most of the networking opportunities the event offered.

Media reports indicate that, while at the CTFK event, she met with representatives of another anti-tobacco organization, the Truth Initiative. Soon after, she left government to become CEO of the Truth Initiative.



# Department of the Interior (DOI)

If personnel is indeed policy, we should fear for our federal lands.

The Department of the Interior (DOI) is tasked with managing our lands, such as national parks and wildlife preserves, and ensuring America stays beautiful. That requires personnel who will ensure our natural resources are properly taken care of and accounted for while keeping the nation's best interests at the forefront.

Sadly, the Biden-Harris DOI has a record of cutting ethical corners in favor of special interest policies.



## Deborah Haaland, Secretary of the Interior

A ship's captain is its most important crew member for good reason: the captain must know his or her ship inside and out and be willing to make the tough decisions. Public service adds a level to this equation in the form of a duty to the American people. Unfortunately, DOI has a leader whose apparent disdain for ethics obligations, reflected by her subordinates' behavior, inspires little confidence in the captain.

Deborah Haaland, the Secretary of the Interior, has been a controversial figure since her Senate confirmation. In July 2022, PPT [filed a complaint](#) against Haaland with the DOI inspector general's office alleging she may have committed a financial reporting violation on her mandatory financial disclosure reporting, form 278e.

Form 278e is a financial disclosure required by all political appointees. She reported no assets on that form and an annual payment of \$175 from Pueblo of Laguna, New Mexico. Prior to joining the Biden-Harris administration, Haaland served one term in the House of Representatives for New Mexico with a salary of \$174,000. While appointees are not required to report federal income, they are required by law to report any bank and investment accounts containing at least \$5,000. Despite gainful employment before being elected to the House, Haaland declined to report any personal bank or investment accounts. As the preferred method of wage and salary payments by the government is via direct deposit, one must wonder how that occurred without her having a bank account, or if she forced them to make a special accommodation just for her.

Haaland has a history of [improperly completed financial disclosures](#). During her tenure in the House, Haaland was forced to file multiple addenda to her congressional financial disclosures, including after the end of her term, and filed a federal tax return a year late. Despite Haaland's 2021 Form 278e indicating she had a net worth of \$0, her financial disclosures after her marriage to her longtime partner listed her net worth between \$970,000 and \$2.125 million — excluding two mortgaged homes (one of which is reportedly worth in excess of \$1 million). The absence of a bank account on her financial disclosure raises many questions. Congressional leaders referenced PPT's complaint in [official oversight](#) of Haaland's financial disclosures in a letter to the inspector general in July 2022, and Haaland was asked about the [availability of her calendars](#) by congressional leaders in 2021 alongside [Senior Counselor to the Secretary Elizabeth Klein](#). Additionally in January 2022, PPT was cited in a [congressional letter](#) to the DOI inspector general regarding the ethical issues at the department.

Haaland was hit with another [ethics complaint](#) by PPT in [August 2023](#) after she imposed a moratorium on oil and gas leases near the Chaco Canyon National Historic Park in New Mexico despite telegraphing a clear pre-determined position through several public statements.



Additionally, Haaland participated in a film, *Our Story: The Indigenous Led Fight to Protect Greater Chaco*, which was narrated by her own daughter, Somah Haaland. Somah Haaland is a media organizer and lobbyist for Pueblo Action Alliance (PAA) — a self-described revolutionary group that wants to dismantle America's economic and political systems and believes the nation is irredeemable — and the movie uses an apparent one-on-one interview with the secretary in which she railed against the project while still a congresswoman.

PPT obtained FOIA documents that revealed that Interior ethics officials were forced to contact the film's sponsors, the Sierra Club and the Center for Biological Diversity, asking to remove the secretary's title and photo from *Our Story* promotional material.

Additionally, in June 2023, Haaland [was probed](#) by congressional leaders about her involvement with PAA, and the House Natural Resources Committee [demanded additional information](#) about Haaland's "dubious ethical behavior" in October 2023. The impartiality of her Chaco Creek decision-making and involvement with PAA faced [congressional scrutiny](#) in November 2023 and a congressional inquiry into her impartiality was conducted in [June 2024](#). In July 2024 Haaland was asked how she would implement new federal ethics standards [in a letter](#) from congressional representatives.

The apparent ethical violations at DOI under Haaland's watch have [garnered attention](#) from congressional leaders [in both chambers](#). It's difficult to see how this kind of leadership is conducive to maintaining or restoring the public's trust.

## **Tracy Stone-Manning, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)**

The Biden-Harris administration tapped Tracy Stone-Manning, former leader of a special interest group whose graduate thesis [called for population control](#) to protect the environment, to lead the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

But not only did Stone-Manning endorse human population control, during her Senate confirmation hearings she tried to hide her ties in the 1980s to the activist group Earth First! and an eco-terrorism incident it conducted.

In 1989, Stone-Manning retyped and mailed an Earth First! letter to the Forest Service claiming responsibility for spiked trees in Idaho's Clearwater National Forest. Tree spiking is a dangerous eco-terrorist tactic that involves covertly jamming a metal spike into the trunk of a tree to prevent it from being cut down. The practice can injure or kill loggers and mill workers who are unaware that the metal spikes are in the trees. Earth First! spiked the trees to prevent logging, while risking the lives of American workers on the ground.

Stone-Manning eventually turned on members of the plot and testified against them in court in exchange for immunity. However, it also appears she [attempted to cover up](#) her connection to the eco-terrorism case during her Senate confirmation hearings, prompting an [investigation request](#) from PPT to the acting U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia.

The U.S. Senate eventually [confirmed Stone-Manning](#) to her post at BLM in September 2021. After her confirmation, PPT [filed a complaint](#) with the DOI inspector general's office raising concerns that Stone-Manning violated the False Statements Act in her Senate confirmation. Additionally, in January 2022, House members [demanded answers](#) from Stone-Manning on her ethics compliance.

Stone-Manning currently serves as director of BLM.



## Elizabeth Klein, Former Senior Counselor to the Secretary, Currently Director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

Secretary Haaland's top legal advisor, Senior Counselor to the Secretary [Elizabeth Klein](#), was accused of violating federal ethics law as well as the Biden-Harris administration's ethics pledge by engaging in certain matters involving former clients and employees.

In January 2022, PPT and Energy Policy Advocates [filed a complaint](#) against Klein — whose nomination for deputy secretary, the department's #2, was withdrawn — regarding her potential ethics violations after it was revealed she may have withheld critical information regarding the scope of her employment from ethics officials preparing her guidance. Withholding this information itself may be an ethical violation, but it also opened up opportunities for Klein to potentially work on prohibited matters.

From January 2017 to January 2021 when she joined DOI, Klein was the deputy director of the State Energy and Environmental Impact Center (The Center) — a Michael Bloomberg-funded entity that engaged in controversial deals with state attorneys general's offices across America.

Under these agreements, the Center provided communication and consulting services, as well as paid legal fellows for environmental litigation. Much of this litigation went against DOI and EPA efforts and the Center's state litigation program inked agreements in 11 states.

However, documents provided by DOI indicated that Klein may only have revealed relationships in five states. Klein's potential conflicts of interest also drew [congressional attention](#) on [several occasions](#). Additionally, Senator John Barrasso called on Klein and Secretary Haaland to release their [official calendars](#) in October 2021.

The complaint sparked an investigation and report by [DOI's inspector general](#).



## Laura Daniel-Davis, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management

In keeping with the traditions of the Biden-Harris administration, Laura Daniel-Davis — the former Chief of Policy and Advocacy at the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) — appeared to use her leverage in the federal government to help herself and her former employer. The result was an inspector general [investigation and report](#) in July 2024.

Oil and gas extraction from the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in the Coastal Plain of Alaska has been a contentious issue for more than four decades. Environmentalists and conservation organizations fiercely oppose extracting these resources. One such organization is NWF, which opposed several aspects of ANWR — including an August 2020 leasing plan, actual leases offered in January 2021, and proposed seismic permits — while Daniel-Davis was at the organization.

Within six months of ascending to her role in the federal government, Daniel-Davis appeared to have used her influence to achieve nearly every legal remedy sought by her former employer in court. The legal arguments used to justify these remedies also appeared to be strikingly similar to those developed and included in NWF's own legal filings.



After that, the parties to the litigation cited Daniel-Davis' actions as justification to support DOI's request for a stay in the lawsuit, or not take a stance on it. It also appears that neither document noted a designated agency ethics official giving Daniel-Davis authorization to participate in the issues.

In September 2022, PPT [filed a complaint](#) with the DOI inspector general alleging that Daniel-Davis [improperly participated](#) in matters regarding the ANWR oil and gas program in violation of both the Biden-Harris administration ethics pledge and federal law. Whistleblower and FOIA documents showed Daniel-Davis apparently crossing the line between personal involvement and substantial involvement with her former employer.

## **Nada Culver, Bureau of Land Management Deputy Director of Policy and Programs**

The Biden-Harris Department of the Interior under Secretary Haaland is chock full of appointees who came from special interest groups involved in the business of the department. Yet another example is Nada Culver, the BLM deputy director of policy and programs, who temporarily warmed the seat as acting director while Tracy Stone-Manning awaited confirmation.

Culver has accumulated a long rap sheet since joining DOI. In [June 2021](#), PPT called on the DOI inspector general's office to investigate possible [ethics violations](#) by Culver involving public land orders (PLOs). Before joining DOI, Culver was the vice president of the Public Lands and Senior Policy Counsel at the National Audubon Society, a special interest organization worth half a billion dollars in 2021.

During her tenure at the National Audubon Society, the group petitioned BLM to stop progress on PLOs to expand mining in Alaska that had been signed off by then-Secretary David Bernhardt. Once Culver got into BLM leadership, however, she [expeditiously pushed](#) for the policies her former employer endorsed in those areas.

An investigation by the Office of the Inspector General in response to the PPT complaint determined in August 2022 that Culver [did not comply](#) with her federal ethics pledge in another matter. House lawmakers [made note](#) of the complaint in June 2021 and contacted the DOI ethics office regarding her alleged ethics violations.

In January 2023, [PPT filed another ethics complaint](#) against Culver after records obtained from FOIA and whistleblowers indicated that Culver may have committed further ethics violations regarding prohibited investments in ConocoPhillips and Berkshire Hathaway. The documents showed Culver's investment in ConocoPhillips — a prohibited investment by the department — well after the divestment period ended. Additionally, Culver [failed to disclose](#) such interests to Congress and was personally involved in matters involving ConocoPhillips' oil and gas Willow Project in Alaska, even as she took part in department actions that were unfavorable to competing oil and gas projects. Culver's situation also [caught the attention](#) of the House Natural Resources Committee Chairman.

In a September 2024 [report](#) on the investigation launched after PPT's complaint, the IG again found that Ms. Culver violated her ethics obligations by failing to report and sell her Berkshire Hathaway stock.

How many strikes does she get?

## **Daniel Cordalis, Deputy Solicitor for Water Resources at the Department of the Interior**

The Interior Department's issues with maintaining ethics and public trust spread into the Office of the Solicitor with Daniel Cordalis, the deputy solicitor for water resources. Back in July 2021, PPT [filed a complaint](#) with DOI, asking the department's inspector general to investigate Cordalis' potential ethics violations.



In June 2021, Cordalis personally rescinded a memo from January of that year issued by career attorneys, implementing the “Cordalis Memo” that increased beneficiary funding to the California Yurok Tribe’s Restoration Fund. However, court records indicated that Cordalis had extensive connections to the Yurok Tribe. The tribe was a client of Cordalis as recently as January 2021 and, at the time of the memo, Cordalis’ wife served as the tribe’s general counsel. Cordalis’ wife was also touted as “the future” of the tribe’s long-term success and appeared before Congress weeks before the “[Cordalis Memo](#)” was issued.

Federal employees are required to act impartially and avoid situations that may create a conflict of interest or the perception of one. They are also barred from working on particular matters involving “covered relationships,” including those with spouses’ employers and their own former employers and clients. Those restrictions were expanded for political appointees under the Biden-Harris administration’s ethics pledge. Cordalis’ apparent ethics violations also [caught the attention](#) of House lawmakers, including House Natural Resources Committee chairman Bruce Westerman. Cordalis left the government before any investigation could be completed.

## **Robert Anderson, Solicitor**

Earning the public’s trust comes from the top, so PPT reached out to DOI Solicitor Robert Anderson in [November 2021](#) about the various apparent ethical missteps under his watch.

As DOI’s top legal officer, Anderson’s duties include ensuring the ethical compliance of political appointees in the department. PPT [sent Anderson a letter](#) alerting him to the potential violations that may have signaled a void in ethical leadership in his department. Several of the potential violations were committed by officials under his direct supervision.

Among the potential violations, PPT noted Cordalis’ potential conflict as related above.

Another incident drew “frustration” and “real anger” from Senator Lisa Murkowski during Laura Daniel-Davis’ confirmation hearing. Daniel-Davis confirmed that DOI had allowed uninvited organizations to attend a virtual tribal consultation. One of the organizations was co-founded by Anderson.

Additionally, the aforementioned call was led by the embattled Nada Culver and included issues relating to the then-ongoing inspector general investigation of Culver.

The Biden-Harris administration set a high bar with its promises to be the most ethical in history. Much too high, it appears, for Deb Haaland’s Department of the Interior to clear.





# Department of Energy (DOE)

If there were a Biden-Harris administration agency to give Interior a run for its money regarding lack of commitment to ethics, it would be the Department of Energy (DOE).

Tasked with powering the nation and managing our energy resources, the dedication of the department under the Biden-Harris administration was exemplified by a department spokesperson who stated [policy took priority over ethics](#) when confronted with an ethics oversight by Secretary Jennifer Granholm.



## Jennifer Granholm, Secretary

The DOE has been under increasing scrutiny with Secretary Granholm at the helm. Granholm's professional history in the green energy sphere raised several questions during her confirmation as secretary of energy. Her subsequent apparent ethical violations have only deepened concern.

Prior to joining the Biden-Harris administration, Granholm served as a board member for the electric vehicle component manufacturer Proterra. Upon joining the administration, she began promoting electric vehicle policies that boosted her former company, and President Biden promoted the company while touring its Greenville, South Carolina facility.

The kicker: Granholm held more than \$1 million in Proterra stock options at the time that President Biden took the Greenville facility tour.

In November 2021, Granholm made an appearance with Vice President Harris and other federal officials to announce awards for DOE's SuperTruck 3 program. Several of the recipients of funds from the program had ties to Proterra and, conveniently, for Granholm, Proterra vehicles were prominently displayed in the backdrop of the announcement, likely further impacting its stock value.

That grant announcement spurred PPT's first [federal ethics complaint](#) against Granholm. PPT had already filed a previous [Hatch Act complaint](#) in October 2021 after Granholm flaunted her official actions [while campaigning](#) for former Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe in his ill-fated re-election attempt. Then in February 2022, a DOE spokesperson told the [Washington Free Beacon](#) that ethics takes a backseat to policy at the department.

Additionally, Granholm [has been pressed](#) on her apparent ethics violations by top House lawmakers, including House Oversight Committee chairman James Comer. Senate Natural Resources Committee ranking member John Barrasso also [formally requested](#) an investigation into Granholm's husband's holdings in June 2023.

PPT's [latest action](#) against Granholm and her disregard of public trust was a [supplemental complaint](#) calling on the DOE to investigate another apparent violation by the secretary. In July 2023, media reports revealed that Granholm admitted her husband owned stock in Ford Motor Company, which has "worked closely" with the Biden-Harris administration and DOE. The Ford Motor Company was a direct recipient of the SuperTruck 3 grant.

Additionally, while Granholm's husband held stock in Ford, the secretary joined her fellow Cabinet member Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg in a video endorsing the new electric vehicles, appearing to use her official position to promote Ford products.



In August 2023, PPT joined a non-profit coalition [in a letter](#) calling on [Granholt to resign](#) over the [repeated ethics failures](#) of her and her subordinates.

Granholt currently serves as the secretary of energy.

### **Kelly Speakes-Backman, Acting Assistant Secretary for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) and Deputy Assistant Secretary of EERE**

Granholt's apparent lax ethical standards are undoubtedly having an effect on her department. In one prominent example, former Acting Assistant Secretary for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Kelly Speakes-Backman faced multiple complaints from nonpartisan watchdog groups about her relationship with her former employer and its member organizations.

In May 2021, PPT [found several instances](#) where it appeared that Speakes-Backman [took part](#) in public speaking engagements where she either endorsed the Energy Storage Association (ESA), the organization she formerly led as CEO, or received sponsorship by a "Leadership Circle" Member of the ESA. Therefore, as a high-ranking public official in the DOE, former associates of Speakes-Backman stood to gain significant financial benefits under the initiatives her office leads. This apparent leveraging of her official status to boost her former employer came on the heels of similar behavior from the leadership at DOE. Just two months later, in July 2021, PPT took action after we found [several more instances](#) of possible [favoritism](#) by Speakes-Backman toward her former employer.

Additionally, several House lawmakers [demanded answers](#) from Granholt over the apparent ethics violations by Speakes-Backman in July 2021.

Speakes-Backman left the government in 2022.



# Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is an independent agency with Cabinet-level authority and an important component in enacting the Biden-Harris administration's climate and energy agendas. Unfortunately, strict adherence to ethics and avoiding appearances of impropriety do not seem to carry the same level of importance.

## Joseph Goffman, Assistant Administrator, Office of Air and Radiation

Just because someone should know better does not always mean that person does. Take the case of Assistant Administrator for the EPA's Office of Air and Radiation (OAR), Joseph Goffman. Goffman served at EPA for the nearly entire eight years of the Obama administration, presumably subject to the very same rules of behavior as in his current role. Interestingly, he is considered one of the architects of the Obama Clean Power Plan, which was struck down by the Supreme Court as a massive federal overreach.

In [August 2021](#), PPT [filed a complaint](#) against Joe Goffman with the agency's inspector general. Goffman left the Obama administration to become the Executive Director of the Environmental and Energy Law Program at Harvard Law School. Then, in April 2021, less than two weeks after signing his recusal statement, which prohibited him from participating in certain matters involving Harvard, Goffman admitted to violating this recusal statement by recommending subordinates of his take a meeting with representatives from Harvard University. The representative who requested the meeting also had Goffman on her podcast while Goffman was at Harvard.

In August 2022, PPT requested the EPA's inspector general [investigate further instances](#) of Goffman interacting with former colleagues from Harvard, including a professor and former Obama administration colleague [asking him for a "favor."](#)

Another exchange saw Goffman pledging to "inquire" with his EPA colleagues about a Harvard professor's request to "answer any questions or brief EPA officials" on issues discussed in a letter submitted by the professor to a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee.

Additionally, Goffman drew a [third ethics complaint](#) from PPT regarding [more than 80 financial holdings](#) requiring recusal or a written waiver for matters involving those interests. Goffman also continued to involve himself with Harvard University — a former associate signed off on two letters aiming to direct millions of taxpayer dollars to an anti-noise program in the office led by Goffman. Another letter signed by a former Harvard colleague asked Goffman to arrange a meeting with another high-level EPA official "so we can make a pitch for including money in his budget." [Congressional leaders raised the alarm](#) in October 2023 on Goffman's role in the Biden-Harris administration's \$27 billion Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) at the EPA.

[Reality caught up](#) with Goffman, though, when the EPA Inspector General [dropped a report in September 2024](#) investigating four separate potential ethics violations, including an issue raised by PPT in our third complaint against the official. The IG found that Goffman "failed" when it came to his ethics obligations. The IG referred Goffman to the U.S. Attorney's office in Washington, D.C. — an action the inspector general's office never takes frivolously. Additionally, [the press noted](#) that Goffman's "episode could be seen as a preventable embarrassment for EPA."

## Melissa Hoffer, Principal Deputy General Counsel

The number and nature of ethics complaints at the EPA are astounding, but, given the Biden-Harris administration's penchant for throwing ethics to the wayside, it only makes sense.

This brings us to [Melissa Hoffer](#), the EPA's principal deputy general counsel who appeared to fail to follow proper ethics procedures while seeking employment outside of the government.



Hoffer joined the EPA in January 2021, after serving for eight years in the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office. She served as acting general counsel until Jeff Prieto was confirmed to the position in November 2021 and she left the EPA in December 2022.

Toward the end of her time at the EPA, Hoffer negotiated a state cabinet-level position as Massachusetts' "Climate Chief" for the then-newly created Office of Climate Innovation and Resilience. Widely lauded as the nation's first "climate czar," Hoffer was required by federal ethics law to notify the EPA's ethics office within three business days of any agreement or negotiations about employment with any non-federal entity.

PPT obtained documents through a FOIA request showing that Hoffer's negotiations with Massachusetts began on November 28, 2022, but were not made known to the EPA ethics office until December 16. Hoffer was notified by the office to complete her ethics requirements just 35 minutes after learning of her pending departure but she did not complete the notification until December 27, 2022 — nearly a month after her negotiations with Massachusetts started. PPT filed an ethics complaint against Hoffer with the EPA in August 2023.

## **David Hayes, former White House Special Assistant to the President for Climate Policy**

The West Wing's gilded revolving doors have notably turned for David Hayes, the former White House Special Assistant to the President for Climate Policy.

PPT [filed an ethics complaint](#) with both the Office of Government Ethics and EPA inspector general's office against Hayes in June 2024. [In the complaint](#), PPT called for an investigation into Hayes' adherence to ethical obligations when the EPA moved \$5 billion from the GGRF — a major part of the potential "Greendoggle" — to an organization of which Hayes serves on the board.



The move also [received House scrutiny](#), including from House Energy and Commerce Committee chairwoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers.

Hayes served on the board of the Coalition for Green Capital (CGC), a "nonprofit consortium of 'green banks,'" until he left to join the Biden-Harris administration in January 2021. While in the White House, Hayes worked with both the National Climate Advisor and the National Climate Task Force on green energy projects, with one of his chief accomplishments being the establishment of "the first-ever 'whole of government' effort to improve the U.S.'s resilience in the face of climate change." Hayes also worked to implement the climate change provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Shortly after leaving the administration in October 2022, Hayes rejoined the board of CGC and joined the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) as a senior fellow. NRDC is partnered with CGC and is actively involved in litigation with the EPA over regulations and engages with the EPA in other matters. NRDC also lobbies the EPA on environmental issues within its jurisdiction and comments on the agency's proposed rules.

In an amazing coincidence, after rejoining CGC it was awarded \$5 billion from the GGRF that Hayes had, presumably, helped to craft while working at the White House.



Not only is the revolving door between the Biden-Harris administration personnel and powerful special interest groups, but it appears truckloads of Greendoggle cash are flying through it as well.

## **David Batson, former Senior Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Specialist and ADR Counsel**

In April 2023, PPT [filed an ethics complaint](#) against David Batson, the EPA's former Senior Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Specialist and ADR Counsel.

PPT [filed the complaint](#) regarding apparent ethics violations in Batson's deep involvement in a controversial, near-\$2 billion Superfund cleanup project. PPT alleged that Batson was violating the "Lifetime Ban" on former federal employees' involvement with issues they dealt with while in government.

In December 2022, the EPA entered a consent decree with 85 entities accused of contributing to New Jersey's Lower Passaic River's pollution, known as the Diamond Alkali Superfund Site. In the settlement, the entities agreed to pay \$150 million — less than 10 percent of the estimated \$1.8 billion total cleanup costs — raising concern from New Jersey leadership that the more than \$1 billion gap "will likely fall onto the taxpayers."

Whistleblower information obtained by PPT, alongside publicly-available documents, media reports, and court filings, appeared to indicate that Batson was involved at the [Superfund site](#) both during his EPA tenure and after he left in 2015.

In [March 2024](#), PPT learned that an EPA ethics official who became involved to dismiss the allegations did not share necessary details to properly address the watchdog's issues. When the EPA received PPT's original complaint, Justina Fugh — the leader of the agency's ethics office — defended Batson while omitting important information. Upon making this discovery, PPT submitted a [supplemental claim](#) with the EPA's inspector general because the errors were so egregious.

Looking at the incidents involving Batson and others at EPA, the behavior of the ethics office also raises red flags. The office appears to have [provided cover](#) for Biden-Harris administration appointees' and Batson's apparent ethics missteps, disregarding well-established standards of integrity and offering [lax enforcement](#) of agency rules.



# Department of Education (ED)

The mission of ED is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. The department has seemingly strayed far from that mission during the Biden-Harris administration, allowing political concerns and special interests to drive the bus, further eroding the public's trust.

Emblematic of the change in approach at ED, PPT uncovered records demonstrating that, while the frustration of parents with their children's education was spilling out all over the country, their concerns were being spurned at the department. Teachers' unions, including those that helped write guidance that kept many schools closed, were provided [concierge-level service](#), while at the same time ED [botched](#) an attempt to create a parents advisory group and helped promote efforts to target parents who expressed dissatisfaction with school policies.

The problems at the department most certainly stem from the top. Unfortunately, they do little to improve student achievement and much to harm the public's evaporating trust in its government.

## Miguel Cardona, Secretary of Education/Office of Special Counsel

The Hatch Act — the federal law prohibiting officials from using official resources for political purposes — appears to have been viewed as little more than a suggestion by the Biden-Harris administration. One of the remedial learners of this civics course is, ironically, Education Secretary Miguel Cardona.

In July 2024, PPT [filed a complaint](#) with the ED inspector general and the Office of Special Counsel calling on them to investigate Cardona's apparent violation of the Hatch Act.

Cardona attacked Republicans as "siding with special interests and trying to block Americans from accessing all the benefits of the most affordable student loan repayment plan in history" while promoting the Biden-Harris administration as "fighting" for the recipients. This, despite the fact that Biden's student loan giveaway was opposed by members of Congress from both parties.

The Office of Special Counsel [issued](#) a determination on the complaint.



## Donna Harris-Aikens, Deputy Chief of Staff

The department's cozy relationship with teachers' unions does not just raise skeptical eyebrows about whose interests it is promoting, but can also create potential conflicts of interest concerns. PPT [filed a complaint](#) against a high-ranking official of the department for just that in [December 2022](#).

Prior to joining the Biden-Harris administration, Donna Harris-Aikens, the deputy chief of staff at ED, worked for one of the nation's largest teachers' unions, the National Education Association (NEA) as its Senior Director of Education and Policy Practice. FOIA documents obtained by PPT showed that, once at the department, Harris-Aikens was in regular contact with union officials — despite the administration's prohibition on participation in certain matters involving former employers.



Included in the FOIA documents were emails surrounding a joint Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and ED media call on reopening guidance for schools after the COVID-19 pandemic. The CDC faced criticism in the wake of the pandemic for allowing teachers unions to exert undue influence on reopening guidance.

Despite her ethical restrictions, Harris-Aikens was active as a go-between with ED and the two largest teachers' unions, including her former employer. In January 2021, Harris-Aikens personally contacted NEA President Becky Pringle and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) president Randi Weingarten to coordinate a call with the pair. Harris-Aikens said she "wanted to make sure you both have an opportunity to hear directly from the Department before any public activity." The day prior to the CDC guidance call, Harris-Aikens reached out to the two organizations offering to "brief" their leadership on unreleased data.

The teachers' unions' influence on school reopening guidance created a firestorm of controversy. That it may have been the result of improper contact between officials at ED and the unions is yet another straw on the breaking back of the public's trust.





# Department of Commerce (DOC)

Arguably one of the most influential departments, the Department of Commerce (DOC) facilitates America's economy and sets the rules to ensure fair play. This charge requires immense amounts of public trust, but it seems the officials the Biden-Harris administration tasked to lead this missed the memo.

Like the other departments in this report, DOC has seen possible ethics missteps blemish its record, and it appears they stem from the top.



## Gina Raimondo, Secretary of Commerce

PPT filed an [ethics complaint](#) against Commerce [Secretary Gina Raimondo](#) calling for an investigation into several potential ethics violations involving her and her husband. FOIA records revealed that Raimondo, the former treasurer and governor of Rhode Island, signed a statement acknowledging that she is "disqualified from participating as Secretary in particular matters having a direct and predictable effect on the financial interests of PathAI, a company that makes medical diagnostic software, including matters affecting the company as a member of an industry sector or group." Raimondo's husband, Andrew Moffit, is an executive and part-owner of PathAI.

The documents obtained by PPT also show that Raimondo was not shy to talk shop about her husband's job, even texting Democratic Senator Maria Cantwell of Washington in 2021, "Also sometime you're in D.C. I'd love to have dinner with you and my husband.

He works at a very cool artificial intelligence start up." Cantwell oversees AI-related matters for the Senate as chairwoman of the chamber's Commerce Committee.

A month later, Raimondo received an email from Helmy Eltoukhy of the biotech company Guardiant Health reading, "It was very nice meeting you and your husband Andy. Such a small world given the PathAI and Fialkow connections." The "Fialkow" mentioned by Eltoukhy is venture capitalist and PathAI investor David Fialkow, who gifted the secretary and her husband a \$2,700 meal and three tickets to the 2021 Kennedy Center Honors. In 2023, the secretary's AI calendar exploded, featuring meetings with the heads of Apple and Microsoft, Google's CFO, and "Dinner with Mika Brzezinski and Joe Scarborough."

Subsequent FOIA documents revealed further incidents in which Secretary Raimondo may have mixed her official business and her husband's in a manner that violated her disqualification statement. Little wonder why the public's trust in its government continues to plummet.





# Department of State

In our ever-changing world, the State Department plays an integral part in navigating the complexities of foreign policy. The public relies on the State Department to be the first line of offense and defense when dealing with foreign powers, and they require the public to trust them to do the best job possible.

However, amid global instability and wars in Europe and the Middle East, the Biden-Harris State Department shifted its focus to what they believe to be a more pressing issue: climate change. This decision, coupled with the hypocritical travel tendencies of the nation's leading voice on climate change, has only withered the public's trust in the department.

## John Kerry, Special Climate Envoy

To become a special envoy for the U.S. government is to carry a bright torch, especially for matters of scientific importance. That's why it was so troubling to see our jet-setting then Special Climate Envoy John Kerry push scientific malfeasance.

In [June 2023](#), PPT [lodged a complaint](#) with the Department of State and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy regarding Kerry's apparent misrepresentation of scientific evidence in a speech at the time on climate issues in agriculture when he wildly claimed that greenhouse gasses kill 15 million people each year. The jaw-dropping claim, unsurprisingly, was not presented with any supporting scientific data.

Kerry made the claim in May 2023 during an official appearance at the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate. During his remarks, Kerry stressed the urgency for the agricultural sector to reach zero carbon emissions and made his dramatic claim, which appeared to violate the State Department's scientific standards as well as his own office's standards.



Kerry's actions as the special climate envoy also sparked House members to [call for him](#) in September 2022 to preserve documents. House members in October 2022 called out Kerry for [failing to respond](#) to inquiries about his Cabinet-level job that does not require Senate approval as well as special interest group influence on his office. Congressional leaders also requested information about the nature of his negotiations with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in [February 2023](#) and in [April 2023](#) the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability again called out Kerry's office for failing to respond to their information requests.

Startling claims made without scientific support and deliberately hiding information, also exemplified by subordinates in Kerry's office [discussing](#) with him "all the elements we can't put on paper," – John Kerry's secretive climate office comprises yet another office in which behavior falls far short of the lofty rhetoric of the self-proclaimed most ethical and transparent administration in history.

# Other Complaints

## **Ann Carlson, acting Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Department of Transportation (DOT)**

Under the Biden-Harris administration, the DOT has its fair share of apparent missteps documented by PPT. As is often the case, the problem starts at the top. FOIA documents obtained by PPT indicated that, despite his claims to be available 24/7 during his paternity leave from mid-August until October 2021, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg [rebuffed requests](#) from members of Congress during his leave. Many may remember during the time of his leave the supply chain crisis metastasized. Yet Secretary Buttigieg had [no supply chain meetings](#) on his schedule during his leave.

So the situation involving [Ann Carlson](#) should come as no surprise. In November 2023, PPT [filed a complaint](#) with the DOT after Carlson was made the acting administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), which PPT asserted was an illegal move. Carlson was named to the role after her Senate nomination failed to advance out of committee and her nomination was withdrawn.

Carlson was tapped by President Biden to take over former NHTSA administrator Steven Cliff after he resigned from the position. She received harsh criticism from both the public and members of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation due to her activism and lack of experience related to the agency's goal to "save lives, prevent injuries and reduce economic costs due to road traffic crashes, through education, research, safety standards and enforcement activity." Two months later, Biden withdrew her nomination and named her acting administrator — potentially outside of the Federal Vacancies Reform Act (FVRA).

Carlson left NHTSA in December 2023.



## **Stacy Dean, Deputy Undersecretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, Department of Agriculture (USDA)**

In March 2024, PPT [filed a complaint](#) with the USDA regarding potential ethics misconduct by [Stacy Dean](#), the Deputy Undersecretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services. Documents obtained via FOIA revealed that Dean communicated with her former employer, a research and policy institute the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) and took actions possibly financial beneficial to the organization in an apparent violation of the ethics agreement she signed.

Prior to joining the Biden-Harris administration in 2021, Dean was the vice president for food assistance policy at CBPP, which is known for advocating for state and federal food assistance policies. notably the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The FOIA documents revealed that Dean provided CBPP with research and drafting work from her team in the summer of 2021.

As FNS's deputy undersecretary, Dean has a wealth of inside knowledge that is of value to her former employer. Dean has set up closed meetings with CBPP, asked them for guidance with her role at USDA, added other USDA staffers to emails and meetings with CBPP staff, and several times exchanged contact information with CBPP employees.



This apparent favoritism of a former employer only serves to weaken the public's trust in our government.

**Jen Easterly, Director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, Department of Homeland Security (DHS)**



In [December 2022](#), PPT filed an ethics complaint against Director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) [Jen Easterly](#) alleging that she violated ethics prohibitions on federal employees endorsing products or services on official social media accounts. Media reports from the time noted Easterly's glowing endorsement of a book about tech and the underworld, which she deleted only after being alerted by a member of the media that it may be an ethics violation.

Easterly had at least two Twitter (now X) accounts. Her official account, as of 2022, had more than 50,000 followers, far more than her private account. Therefore, her online influence came almost exclusively from her government position. Easterly's interview in a YouTube "Fireside Chat" was referenced in a House Homeland Security subcommittee [letter to Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas](#).



# Conclusion

If history is any guide, expect over the next few years story after story after story in the mainstream press about the “scandal-free” nature of the Biden-Harris administration. It bragged about the strength of the ethics pledge it enacted for all political appointees to follow and promised to be the most ethical and transparent in history – setting the bar extremely high.

If that mark had really been what the administration was striving for, the American public would have every expectation that there would be not only no actual violations found but that the level of commitment to ethics requirements would have been so intense that it would be rare to find an appointee treading into gray areas.



However, with this report as evidence, the reality comes nowhere near the level of the rhetoric.

Whether because political considerations have taken priority over ethics obligations, or special interest influence has overridden commitments to ethics requirements, or simply a lackadaisical attitude toward compliance with ethics regulations, the Biden-Harris administration can hardly be judged to have cleared the bar it set for itself.

We have documented possible violations of ethics obligations in most of the Cabinet-level agencies, with many of our complaints generating investigations by Inspectors General, the Office of Special Counsel or other investigative bodies, or prompting letters from Congressional committees. Several have even resulted in determinations that actual violations had occurred, including some with referrals to criminal authorities. And ours are not the only allegations and determinations of violations that have been recorded during the Biden-Harris administration.

As is often the case when it comes to government, sunlight is the best disinfectant. The light we have shone on these incidents may be useful when revisionist historians begin twisting their tales in the coming years, to help expose the myth of a “scandal-free” administration as just that: a myth.

Our work is just getting started.