PUBLIC EMPLOYEES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY
962 Wayne Ave • Suite 610 • Silver Spring, MD 20910

November 24, 2026

Senator Mike Lee
Chair, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Martin Heinrich
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Rand Paul
Chair, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Gary Peters
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Opposition to the Nomination of Dennis Kirk to be Inspector General, Department of the Interior

Dear Chairmen Lee and Paul, and Ranking Members Heinrich and Peters:

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) writes to oppose the nomination of Dennis Kirk to be Inspector General of the Department of the Interior.

PEER represents and supports the scientists, rangers, law enforcement officers, and other public servants who manage America's national parks, public lands, and wildlife. They are often the first to see waste, fraud, and abuse, and the Office of Inspector General (OIG) is where they often turn to report it. This position is critical to ensuring that they employees and contractors can exercise their rights and protect American taxpayers.

An inspector general must be independent

Mr. Kirk is unqualified for this position. He has no background in Interior's core missions and will work to shield the administration rather than pursue independent investigations.

The Inspector General Act requires that inspectors general be appointed "without regard to political affiliation." Mr. Kirk's career runs the other way. He co-wrote a chapter of Project 2025, served as a political appointee at the Office of Personnel Management during President Trump's first term, and advised Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard during the president's second term. He was then placed as a "special advisor" inside the Office of the Intelligence Community Inspector General. Before the Senate acted on his nomination, he was reportedly installed in Interior's OIG as a political appointee.

Much of the OIG's work begins with employees who come forward with concerns about issues involving waste, fraud, or abuse of authority. Interior staff will report wrongdoing by the administration only if they trust that the office receiving their complaints will protect their identities and follow the evidence. Mr. Kirk co-wrote a Project 2025 chapter that portrayed federal workers as overpaid and unaccountable and called for weakening civil service protections. That record will chill disclosures before a single complaint is filed.

The OIG also serves as a backstop for addressing scientific integrity concerns. Interior's decisions on endangered species, energy development, water, and public health must rest on law and sound science, not political direction. Allegations of scientific misconduct require an inspector general whose independence is beyond question.

An independent inspector general exists to root out waste, fraud, and abuse and to report the truth to Congress and the American people.

The next inspector general will face extraordinary demands

Under Secretary Doug Burgum, Interior has gone through sweeping reorganizations, deep staffing cuts, questionable contracting decisions, and the diversion of public resources to the president's personal priorities.

The next inspector general will have to address these issues without fear or favor. Some of the issues we are aware of include:

- **Offshore wind:** the halt of fully permitted projects on undisclosed national security grounds, possible conflicts among Interior leadership, and nearly $1 billion in taxpayer reimbursements for relinquished leases.
- **Freedom 250:** federal funds reportedly steered to an entity the administration created, through noncompetitive contracts with politically connected vendors.
- **The Reflecting Pool:** a no-bid contract, and arrests of alleged vandals for damage that later evidence tied to construction failures.
- **Park fees:** visitor fees reportedly diverted to Washington projects, although federal law generally keeps 80 percent with the parks that collected them. Meanwhile, more than 900 park projects went unfunded.
- **The reorganization:** the transfer of thousands of positions to political leadership with no documented savings, while Interior lost about 11,000 career employees that were essential to carrying out core functions, like maintaining our national parks.

Conclusion

Congress built the inspector general system to make sure no administration polices itself. Confirming a purely political actor with close ties to the officials he would oversee would undermine that system at the very moment Interior's conduct most needs independent review. It will also deeply diminish the ability of Congress to effectively carry out its constitutional responsibility to oversee a department that is openly flouting its statutory requirements and responsibilities.

PEER respectfully urges the committee to reject the nomination of Dennis Kirk and to insist on a nominee with genuine oversight experience and demonstrated independence.

Sincerely,

Tim Whitehouse
Executive Director

cc: Members, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources