

December 21, 2017

Stephen Vaden  
Principal Deputy General Counsel  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Vaden,

We are writing today to obtain further information regarding recent questions that have been raised about SES career employees at the Department of Agriculture (USDA). SES career employees are highly skilled leaders that enable the USDA to provide the highest level of service to our farmers, families and rural communities.

In your responses to a question raised by Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow in evaluating your nomination, you identified 12 career SES officials that USDA had reassigned since January 20, 2017.

It is critically important for us to understand the purpose of these reassignments in order to ensure that all staffing changes are made in the best interest of USDA's customers. Please respond in writing to the following questions by January 11, 2018.

1. What role did the Office of General Counsel play in the reassignment of the individuals identified in your responses?
2. Please explain in detail your role in the reassignment of the individuals identified in your responses.
3. Please provide the names of any senior officials in the Office of Human Resources Management that were involved in working on the reassignments identified in your responses.
4. Since January 20, 2017, what changes have been made in the process for performance reviews for the SES employees? Why were any such changes made?
5. For each of the reassigned individuals identified in your responses regarding the SES reassignments, please provide:
  - a. the basis of or reason for the reassignment;
  - b. the qualifications of the reassigned employee for the new position to which the employee was assigned;

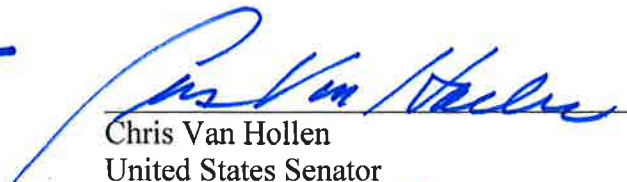
- c. a description of how the reassignment will better serve taxpayer interests and the operations and functioning of USDA;
  - d. the reassigned employee's race, national origin, and gender;
  - e. the date when the reassigned employee first became an SES employee; and
  - f. the name of each individual that replaced the reassigned SES official.
6. Were any of the reassignments identified in your responses regarding the SES reassignments made because of the political affiliation of the individual reassigned or because the individual had worked closely with Obama Administration leadership officials at USDA? If yes, please explain.
  7. During 2017, how many career SES employees have challenged or contested their initial performance evaluation or asked for a higher level of review for their performance ratings, and how many career SES employees had their ratings changed by the Performance Review Board?
  8. During 2016, how many career SES employees have challenged or contested their initial performance evaluation or asked for a higher level of review for their performance ratings, and how many career SES employees had their ratings changed by the Performance Review Board?
  9. Since January 20, 2017, have any career SES employees retired or terminated their employment with the agency in lieu of being reassigned? If so, please provide the name, race, national origin, and gender of any such individuals.
  10. Please provide the names of any other career SES employees USDA has considered reassigning or proposed to be reassigned since January 20, 2017, not listed in the response you previously provided to Ranking Member Stabenow's question.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Debbie Stabenow  
Ranking Member



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator



Joe Donnelly  
United States Senator



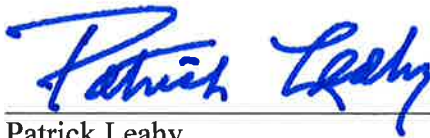
Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Heidi Heitkamp  
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator

cc: Chairman Roberts