

Biden taps N.M. Rep. Deb Haaland for Interior secretary

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Rep. Deb Haaland (D-N.M.) on Capitol Hill in June. Francis Chung/E&E News

President-elect Joe Biden will nominate New Mexico Rep. Deb Haaland (D) to serve as Interior secretary, three sources tell E&E News.

If confirmed by the Senate, the 60-year-old avowedly progressive lawmaker will be the first Native American to head the sprawling department whose responsibilities range from tribal affairs to the management of some 500 million acres of public land.

A member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe, Haaland has posted a green record during her single House term representing an Albuquerque-based congressional district. She was comfortably reelected last month 58% to 42%.

Several congressional Democrats, including House Natural Resources Chairman Raúl Grijalva of Arizona, openly advocated for Biden to nominate Haaland (*E&E Daily*, Nov. 20).

Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands, Haaland served on Biden's climate engagement advisory council and is a co-sponsor of the Green New Deal and related aspirational legislation.

Her "Environmental Justice Legacy Pollution Cleanup Act," [**H.R. 8271**](#), introduced in September, would provide \$100 billion to clean up legacy pollution and would prohibit granting major source air pollution permits in communities already suffering from air pollution ([*E&E Daily*](#), Sept. 18).

"In my own Pueblo of Laguna, I know families who have to haul water because theirs is contaminated," Haaland said at the time, adding the bill would "stop polluters from taking advantage of communities of color and areas living in poverty."

She is an original co-sponsor of the "American Public Lands and Waters Climate Solution Act," [**H.R. 5435**](#), which would direct Interior and the Forest Service to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions from public lands and waters by 2040 ([*E&E News PM*](#), Dec. 17, 2019).

Similar to retiring Sen. Tom Udall (D-N.M.), who was also a top contender for the Interior job, Haaland backs the "30 by 30" initiative, a proposal that would set a national goal of protecting at least 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030.

Raised in a military family, Haaland is a single mother who graduated from the University of New Mexico at 34. She went on to earn her law degree from the same school at 45 years old ([*E&E Daily*](#), Oct. 22).

She's been an outspoken critic of the Trump administration, including its move to cut the size of Bears Ears National Monument by 85% and the size of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by half.

"These two sacred areas, the homelands of our ancestors, are now open to leases and desecration by extractive industries, which will exacerbate climate change and destroy countless sacred sites," Haaland said in August.

Conservation and environmental groups were quick to back the choice.

"Representative Haaland's background and experience make her a supremely qualified nominee for Interior Secretary," said Center for Western Priorities Executive Director Jennifer Rokala.

"President-elect Biden has laid out the most ambitious climate and conservation agenda of any American president, and the nation will be well-served when Haaland puts that plan into action. ... Her nomination is a major step towards moving America to a clean energy future."

"Congresswoman Deb Haaland is a force — an inspirational leader and advocate for climate action, conservation, and sovereign Tribal Nations," said League of Conservation Voters Senior Vice President of Government Affairs Tiernan Sittenfeld. "The contrast between the oil lobbyist David Bernhardt and the first Indigenous person to lead Interior could not be more stark."

Haaland's "nomination signals the Biden administration's recognition of the need to truly engage and consult with the tribes and pueblos on land decisions and acknowledge that we are all occupying Indigenous lands," said Conservation Voters New Mexico Director Demis Foster.