

**Statement of Joseph Balash**  
**Nominee for the Position of Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals**  
**Management of the Department of Interior**  
**Before the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources**  
**United States Senate**  
**September 7, 2017**

Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee, I am humbled to appear here today as President Trump's nominee for the position of Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management of the Department of the Interior. It is an honor to be asked to serve in this role and I thank Secretary Zinke for this tremendous opportunity to work for the people of the United States.

Thank you as well to Senator Sullivan for your introduction, and for the opportunity you gave me to serve you and the people of Alaska in your Senate Office.

I could not be here today without the support of my wife of 21 years, Brenda, who is with me here, along with our youngest child. Our teenager has elected to stay in school since classes just began on Tuesday. My parents are also in the hearing room, Janie and Larry Balash, as well as some of my siblings.

I grew up in a large Air Force family, moving all around the United States. One of the rules my dad instilled in us was that we leave a place better than we found it, whether a picnic area at a park or at the family visiting center for those times he was called to alert duty.

In the early 1980s, we were able to visit my grandparents' homes in the Pittsburgh area twice a year. On those trips, I observed the deterioration of the mighty steel industry that my Grandpap, Dick Sharkins, cherished; at the time, he used to curse the EPA for shutting down the mills that employed him and his Brother Teamsters. At the time, I concluded that the only choice we had was either good jobs or a clean environment.

My dad's next duty station was at Eielson Air Force Base in the Interior of Alaska. This was truly a life-changing event for me. We spent my early teenage years chasing salmon wherever his Subaru could go. As I learned about the spawning cycle of salmon and their dependence on an entire system of water bodies, my appreciation for the value of clean water grew.

At the same time, I began to learn about the Permanent Fund Dividend and where our state's wealth came from. The reality of how Alaska managed to produce so much oil while sustaining healthy salmon populations caused me to revisit those earlier conclusions. I realized that with

the right approach, you can have responsible development without sacrificing clean air and water.

As I wrapped up my collegiate education, I happened upon an opportunity to work for my hometown legislator in Alaska's capital. As I spent the next eight years working as a legislative aide, I learned that our ability to get things done in public service depends on relationships—across regions, across party lines, and despite differences on separate issues.

In 2006 I made my way from the legislative branch to the executive branch of State government. At the Department of Natural Resources, I was charged with leading the organization that manages one of the largest portfolios of land and water in the entire world. While I was there, we resolved disputes that had bedeviled the State for decades; we established new standards for the transfer of ownership in oil and gas properties; we oversaw the placement of the first offshore platform in State waters in nearly 20 years; we opened the first State park in decades with a view of Denali that rivals any other I've seen; and we published maps with clear delineations of trails to enable hunters and anglers to access public lands while respecting private property.

I'm proud of what was accomplished at DNR while I was there, but all of this was really done by the people who carry out the day-to-day duties of the Department. During my time, I learned that managing people that are smarter than you and know more details than you requires an open management approach in order to drive these organizations toward complex decision-making. You have to provide a transparent view into what you are attempting to accomplish and why you want to do it. I believe that an approach like this helps ensure that the organization, as a whole, focuses on the big picture. If confirmed, I would take such an approach at the Department of the Interior.

The public lands of the United States contain a tremendous bounty of natural resources—resources that represent the assets of the American people. When managed effectively, these assets can deliver opportunities to recreate, appreciate, and generate wealth. Under Secretary Zinke's leadership, and the goals established by President Trump, I believe the Department of the Interior can deliver on this promise. My background and the experiences I've gained in managing the vast public resources in my home State have prepared me well to serve as the Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management and it would be my honor to do so.

If confirmed, I will work relentlessly to produce the value the American people deserve from their public lands. This includes recreational access, responsible energy development, and active management of the Department's assets. I will do so within the confines of the laws established by the Congress and with a dedication to transparent leadership and accountability.

Chairman Murkowski, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today. I look forward to your questions.