

Statement of Susan Combs
**Nominee for the Position of Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management
And Budget**
of the Department of the Interior
Before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
July 20, 2017

Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee for the position of Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget at the Department of the Interior. President Trump and Secretary Zinke have paid me an enormous compliment by recommending me for this role as the Department's Chief Financial Officer.

Let me first tell you about my background. I am the fourth generation of my family to own and operate a ranch in the Big Bend area of Texas, and that experience taught me the importance of being tied to the land and its natural resources. I learned how to ride, hunt, and shoot on this ranch with views of the neighboring mountains. From my earliest memories, I learned that we had to be careful stewards of the land, which we hoped to pass on to the next generation. I was raised to think about water and its availability, grass, forbs, habitat, the animals – both wild and domestic on the land –and to think about how we could improve the ranch for future generations.

I saw firsthand the devastating effects of drought in the 1950's and the toll it took on the land and everyone and everything connected to it. That event taught me an indelible lesson about taking care of the land that was taking care of us. Income generated from the ranch was my father's only source of funds.

My father particularly enjoyed saying that you had to be as "tight as the bark on a tree" with your money. I have learned that lesson well, and have worked hard to apply it both on the ranch and in my years of public service, balancing needs with fiscal prudence.

Our ranch is located about thirty miles north of the eastern entrance to Big Bend National Park. We are all proud of this national park, and glad that nearly 400,000 visitors came to our part of the Chihuahuan Desert last year. This area is rich in history, flora, fauna, ancient artifacts and a Texas can-do spirit. This arid high desert teaches that you have to be self-reliant, innovative, and practical.

In later years, I was privileged to serve as a State Representative and then as the Texas Agriculture Commissioner. Traveling across the State and meeting other commissioners from every other state illustrated for me the common bond we all had; we love the land, its people, and the rich array of natural resources everywhere.

As Agriculture Commissioner in 2005 and 2006, I was very fortunate to work with the great staff of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as with the Army at Fort Hood in central Texas, along with a diverse range of partners including the Environmental Defense Fund, Texas Nature Conservancy, Texas Parks & Wildlife, Texas Farm Bureau, Central Texas Cattlemen and other agriculture partners. Through a very collaborative process, we worked together to assemble the Recovery Credit System which the Service adopted, to work for the recovery of the Golden Cheeked Warbler and the Black Capped Vireo while also assisting the Army in its national defense goals. This project made it clear that a cooperative approach to a common goal could indeed produce good results for all participants, and it is the approach that continually I strive for.

After being elected Comptroller in 2006, we had the chance to use this successful method again when there was a proposal to list the Dunes Sagebrush Lizard as endangered. Once again, the Service was a great partner, along with various agriculture and ranching groups as well as oil and gas industry officials. The result was the Texas Conservation Plan that was approved by the Service. Its development was a long and complex process, but resulted in a success for both the species and the area. I was grateful when the Service honored me with the Regional Director's Conservation Partnership Award in 2014 for that work.

The position for which I have been nominated would allow me to assist the Secretary in advancing his goals and priorities for the Department. I believe that the eight years that I served as Comptroller of the State of Texas have given me the ability to analyze, understand and consider how to achieve this mission in an efficient, open, and transparent manner. Secretary Zinke has talked extensively about enhancing human capital as well as maximizing the public's access to our public lands, national treasures and natural resources. The Secretary has committed to addressing the enormous deferred maintenance backlog on lands managed by the Department's bureaus. While Comptroller, we in Texas were able to save nearly \$400 million by revising the State's procurement processes. Lessons that I have learned and skills that I have gained, for example in agency spending and purchasing, will serve as assets as we work to balance the books, make smart investments and increase the efficient operation of the Department's important programs priorities.

The Department of the Interior plays an important role in our national economy. Its many important missions include ensuring the responsible development of energy resources on our public lands, serving as steward of our beautiful parks and public lands, and working to strengthen tribal sovereignty in Indian Country. If confirmed, I will work to ensure the success of the President's and the Secretary's goals for the Department, and I will do so in an open and collaborative manner. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.