

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
January 16, 2025 Hearing: *The Burgum Nomination*  
Questions for the Record Submitted to the Honorable Doug Burgum

**Questions from Chairman Mike Lee**

**Question 1:** The Colorado River is a lifeline for the West, but its future depends on balanced and collaborative management. Federal overreach in past negotiations has often sidelined states, including Utah, that are closest to the issue and most affected by decisions.

How should states take the lead in negotiating agreements related to the Colorado River?

**Response:** The Colorado River is a critical water resource for the seven basin states. It provides drinking water to 40 million people, is home to 30 Tribes, irrigates 4 million acres of farmland, including 90% of the Nation's winter vegetables, generates enough hydropower for almost 800,000 households, fosters recreational opportunities and contains fish and wildlife habitat. The Colorado River is governed by what's called the Law of the River, a collection of compacts, federal and state statutes, court decisions, a treaty with Mexico and agreements between the seven states and the federal government, Tribes and others. Each of these items allowed for the development and allocation of the River and is a result of a series of negotiations between various parties. The seven basin states are leaders in helping find a long-term agreement post-2026. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the states, Tribes and other parties to foster further dialogue to help find a durable resolution to this pressing matter.

**Question 2:** As a governor, you are likely familiar with the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program. This program was created to compensate state, county, and local governments for the inability to collect property taxes on federal lands. However, PILT payments have historically been only a fraction of what property taxes would generate, leaving schools, police and fire departments, and communities underfunded.

Would you agree with me that DOI should make PILT a budget priority? And more generally, what reforms, if any, would you propose to the PILT program to address concerns about long-term reliability?

**Response:** The Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) Program provides payments to states to offset losses in property taxes due to nontaxable public lands within their boundaries. The Department of the Interior is obligated, by law, to annually distribute PILT payments to applicable states in accordance with established formulas set by law. These funds help local governments offset the costs for essential services such as firefighting, police services, and construction of schools. As a Governor, I deeply understand the challenges of providing essential services in rural areas. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and other policymakers on the challenges associated with PILT payments and I will work to ensure we implement this law faithfully when it comes to payments to PILT counties.

**Question 3:** The permitting process for energy and mineral development on federal lands has become a major bottleneck for projects critical to national security and economic growth. According to a recent report from S&P Global, the total lead time for developing a new critical

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mineral mine takes an average of 29 years in the U.S., second only to Zambia for the slowest in the world. China has already begun to sever its exports of several essential minerals. We need to make sure that we do not fall behind.

What do you plan to do as Secretary to speed up this process?

**Response: According to the 2024 Mineral Commodity Summary published by the United States Geological Survey, in 2023, imports made up more than one-half of the U.S. consumption for 49 nonfuel mineral commodities. The United States was 100% net import reliant for 15 of those minerals and China and Canada were the leading foreign import sources. The USGS plays an important role in assisting our Nation to identify the location of these important resources, including areas where such important resources can be found in commercial quantities on public lands. In such areas where minerals may be found on federal lands, it is very likely that the commercial development of a locatable mineral will be applicable to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, the Mining Law of 1872, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the Clean Water Act of 1972, and the Clean Air Act of 1970, to name just a few. Navigating the regulatory structures of these statutory obligations in these many different agencies concurrently is understandably daunting. If confirmed, I will work hard to find meaningful yet lawful efficiencies to reduce permitting delays, increase regulatory certainty, and promote access to our nation's critical mineral resources.**

**Question 4:** Restricting access to federal lands harms local economies and increases the risk of catastrophic wildfires by limiting grazing, timber harvesting, and other active management practices. Recreation is also stifled, cutting off opportunities for the public to enjoy these lands.

What is your perspective on balancing conservation with ensuring access for grazing, recreation, and active management? How would you address the wildfire crisis through improved land management practices?

**Response: Fuels management is an important aspect of federal land management for all of the Department of the Interior land management bureaus. Once confirmed, I will work to ensure aggressive use of all tools available, including but not limited to, mechanical thinning, timber salvage sales, prescribed burns, and targeted livestock grazing along with better implementation of categorical exclusions to enable responsible activity in a timely manner in order to reduce fuel loads and better address wildfire risk.**

**Questions from Ranking Member Martin Heinrich**

**Question 1:** Conservation easements provide mutual benefit for landowners, sportsmen, and the wildlife that depend on these landscapes. Easements are also an important tool for keeping working lands intact. Do you support the continued use of conservation easements?

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**Response:** Voluntary conservation easements are often used as an alternative to fee acquisition to help an agency achieve conservation value while allowing the land to remain in private ownership. Private landowners have played a key role in protecting and promoting habitat conservation throughout the nation. As a life-long sportsman, I know firsthand the importance of conserving habitat to support healthy wildlife populations and I look forward to working with you on this important issue, if confirmed.

**Question 2:** As a hunter, you know the importance of sportsmen access and wildlife habitat facilitated through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), but LWCF is also a tool of good governance. Federal land agencies enjoy significant cost savings by resolving checkerboard land patterns which complicate management and frustrate access. LWCF keeps working forests in production and creates, protects, and enhances recreation opportunities. How do you view LWCF as a tool to maximize recreation and sportsmen opportunities and improve federal land management?

**Response:** Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was established by Congress in 1964 to assist in preserving, developing, and assuring accessibility to outdoor recreation resources and to strengthen the health and vitality of our citizens through greater recreational access. Today, the LWCF is primarily funded from receipts from offshore oil and natural gas development on the federal OCS and funds have been used, especially at the state level, to acquire and conserve important lands that promote recreational use, including hunting and fishing – including many youth baseball fields, campgrounds, playground, and other state park upgrades in my home state of North Dakota. I look forward to working with you and your colleagues on this and other important programs that seek to increase recreational access for our citizens.

**Question 3:** The property clause of the United States Constitution reads in part that— “The Congress shall Power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States...”. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act was passed by Congress in 1976 to implement that provision of the Constitution for lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service. Will you commit to managing public lands in accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the property clause of the Constitution?

**Response:** I will commit to managing our nation’s public lands in accordance with all applicable laws, including the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

**Question 4:** Prior to taking any action that would reduce the size of a national monument or other public land protection, will you commit to personally meeting with leaders of any tribes that have a historic or current-day connection with the area protected?

**Response:** I look forward to working with Tribes and believe tribal input is incredibly important. Ultimately, the Antiquities Act of 1906 grants the President the authority to designate or change monument boundaries. Should a decision be made by the President related to a national monument, I will follow all applicable laws.

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**Question 5:** The Colorado River Basin gets all the headlines. However, long-term aridification is also permanently reducing water supplies in the Rio Grande Basin. How will the Department address aridification in the Rio Grande Basin and make sure that drought resiliency projects continue to be prioritized and funded in every basin that needs them?

**Response:** Like many basins throughout the Western United States, drought continues to have a negative impact on communities and the environment in the Rio Grande Basin. I look forward to learning more about the specific impacts and the tools that have been used to mitigate drought in the Rio Grande Basin and will work with you on this effort, if confirmed.

**Question 6:** President-elect Trump signed the Great American Outdoors Act into law in 2020, permanently funding one of the most successful conservation programs in our nation's history, the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Even with the funding provided by that law, there are more projects proposed by local communities than funding available to complete them. Will you continue the Trump administration's support for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and support funding for locally supported projects?

**Response:** The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was enacted in 1965 and has provided significant funds to the federal, state and local governments and communities for a wide range of locally supported projects that promote recreation for our nation's citizens. The Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) provided \$900 million annually in permanent funding for LWCF. Within that GAOA framework, the Executive branch proposes LWCF funding allocations in the annual budget request process and Congress reviews these proposals as part of the annual appropriations process, followed by Executive branch implementation. This process requires a collaborative partnership between the two branches from the beginning to the end, with the Department of the Interior playing a key role. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you on the future of LWCF funding.

**Question 7:** Our country's relationships with the Freely Associated States—that's the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau—are a critical strategic asset in our efforts to counter the influence of the Chinese Government in the Pacific. Last year, Congress approved funding to implement the Compacts of Free Association with these independent nations over the next 20 years, and it's the responsibility of the Interior Department to oversee that implementation. Will you commit to regularly briefing Congress on the implementation of the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2023?

**Response:** Yes. If confirmed, I look forward to briefing Congress on implementation of this law.

**Question 8:** You were nominated to be Secretary of the Interior and not head of the National Energy Council, which isn't a statutory office and does not exist in law. But the President-elect has made known his intent for you to serve in both roles. The Secretary of the Interior is the

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guardian of the American people over their public lands—not just for this generation, but for future generations as well. The National Energy Council seems designed to make energy production dominant over other values and uses of public land. How will you balance these competing interests?

**Response:** As I stated in my response to a live hearing question from Senator Hoeven regarding the National Energy Council, the intent is for the Council to be a convening opportunity for agencies that have statutory authorities that affect our nation’s energy policies to coordinate. The goal, as stated by President Trump, is to reduce red tape and bureaucratic redundancy between agencies. Historically, presidents of both parties have convened similar interagency or taskforces to serve a policy coordination function within the Executive Branch. Agencies will still need to act within their statutory authorities in the implementation of any policies in accordance with the law.

**Question 9:** There have been reports of non-federal, non-contractor “volunteers” entering federal agencies to receive briefings on information that is not available to the public, just because Elon Musk has said they're volunteering for him. Public servants are required to comply with federal ethics and privacy laws and swear an oath to the constitution for a reason. These volunteers are subject to no oversight or accountability. Are you going to allow Elon Musk's "volunteers" to access information at the Interior Department that's not available to regular Americans? Will you hold them to the same ethics, privacy, and transparency rules as federal employees and contractors?

**Response:** While the details on the efforts to establish the Department of Government Efficiency and its purported interface with federal agencies has yet to be directed, the President has clearly articulated his hopes to increase efficiency within the federal government. The Department of the Interior has long had a familiarity with the public comment and public input process, which in some cases is enshrined in its relevant organic acts. If confirmed, I will see to it that the Department will follow the law as well as the advice of our designated agency ethics official (DAEO) with regard to engagement with DOGE, just as we would with any number of federal and nonfederal stakeholders.

**Question 10:** A proposal to permanently increase the pay of wildland firefighters at the Department of the Interior has bipartisan support here in Congress. Both the House and Senate appropriations bills for fiscal year 2025 included that permanent pay increase and the funding necessary to implement it. Will you commit to supporting a permanent increase to the salaries of federal wildland firefighters?

**Response:** Wildland firefighters are some of the most important and courageous employees within the Department of the Interior. I believe that their pay should certainly reflect the level of risk that they assume in that role. Should legislation be enacted to increase wildland firefighter pay, I would follow the law to ensure that the Department administered any such increase, if confirmed.

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**Question 11:** If confirmed, will you commit to preserving the scientific integrity of the Department of the Interior and U.S. Geological Survey's work, to preserve its independence from political interference, and to deliver unbiased scientific findings to the Administration, Congress, and the public?

**Response: If confirmed, I will ensure that the Department follows all applicable laws governing scientific work and data transparency.**

**Question 12:** At the end of the year, Congress raised the authorization for the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project temporarily by \$770 million to meet the commitments the federal government made in its settlement with the Navajo Nation for the San Juan Basin. Completion of the project will provide a critical new source of water for Navajo Nation, Jicarilla Apache Nation, and the City of Gallup. If confirmed, will you support making the \$770 million increase in authorization permanent, and providing the funding to allow completion of the project by the Bureau of Reclamation?

**Response: Tribal water rights settlements can help provide certainty to tribal and non-tribal communities through water supply availability and can help reduce legal liability for the federal government and other entities. Many of the federally enacted water rights settlements require federal and state funding and actions necessary to complete the plans implementing the settlements. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you on this and other tribal water rights settlements.**

**Question 13:** If confirmed, what specific steps will you take to ensure that Tribal consultation is a meaningful and enforceable process, rather than a box checking formality?

**Response: As Governor, tribal engagement was important to me. I worked extensively with Tribes, listened and had meaningful dialogue. If confirmed, I will continue this commitment and follow the Department's applicable regulations on Tribal consultation.**

**Question 14:** If confirmed, what steps would you take to improve public safety on Tribal lands, particularly as it relates to the Department of the Interior's collaboration with the Department of Justice?

**Response: During my time as Governor of North Dakota, I identified three areas of joint concern with our Tribes for which the Federal response must be improved; one, more efficient and effective allocation of resources for basic law enforcement in Indian Country; two, addressing the crisis of drug trafficking across Indian Country; three, addressing the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples. If confirmed, I commit to working closely with our Federally recognized Tribes and the Department of Justice, our federal partner for law enforcement in Indian Country, to improve law enforcement and public safety in Tribal communities.**

**Question 15:** If confirmed, what specific steps will you take to address the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples, particularly as it concerns improve interagency coordination on

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public safety and those agencies' investigative capacity to ensure Tribal and BIA law enforcement are adequately resourced and supported?

**Response: On November 26, 2019, President Trump signed Executive Order 13898, forming the Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) and initiating Operation Lady Justice. I am pleased that the current Administration continued this effort. Based on the consultations and report of the Operation Lady Justice Task Force and the subsequent reports and recommendations required by the Not Invisible Act Commission, I will work with the Department of Justice and tribal, state and local law enforcement agencies to continue addressing this ongoing crisis across Indian Country if confirmed.**

**Question 16:** If confirmed, how will you collaborate with the Department of Justice and Tribal governments to implement recommendations in the Not Invisible Act Commission's recent report?

**Response: As stated above, I believe the work already started will be an important stepping off point in continuing this important effort, and if confirmed, I look forward to reviewing further this report and working with you on this important issue.**

**Question 17:** If confirmed, how would you approach the challenges of managing water resources under the Bureau of Reclamation and the Secretary of Interior's Water Rights Office to ensure fair management among Tribal, municipal, agricultural, commercial, and environmental interests, particularly with respect to Indian water rights settlements and negotiations?

**Response: The Secretary of the Interior's Indian Water Rights Office, along with the Bureau of Reclamation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other federal departments and agencies, play key roles in fostering dialogue, providing technical and legislative drafting assistance and other important items necessary to enact settlements that avoid protracted and costly litigation and provide water supply certainty for tribal and non-tribal communities. Tribal water rights settlements can provide water supply certainty to tribal and non-tribal water users and resolve legal claims between tribal and non-tribal parties, federal and state governments and other entities. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing these important Interior Department missions.**

**Question 18:** Many Tribal communities still lack reliable access to clean drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. If confirmed, what specific actions will you take to address these inequities and support Tribal water security?

**Response: The Secretary of the Interior's Indian Water Rights Office, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other agencies within the Department of the Interior provide water supply project assistance to Tribal and other communities, mainly through enacted Tribal water rights settlements and grants. I understand that the Indian Health Service within the Department of Health and Human Services has responsibility for wastewater infrastructure. As the former Governor of North Dakota, I am very aware of**

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**the challenges many tribal communities face in receiving some of the most basic public services, including the need for access to water. If confirmed, I look forward to working with my colleagues within the federal government on this important issue.**

**Question 19:** Will you commit to improving the implementation and enforcement of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and the protection of Tribal cultural heritage from looting, destruction, trafficking, and exploitation pursuant to federal law?

**Response: The protection of Tribal graves and cultural heritage is a solemn responsibility of the Department and the Department of Justice. If confirmed, I commit to reviewing the Department’s current efforts to meet its statutory duties and our trust responsibility to Tribes. I also commit to working closely with the Attorney General to assist the DOJ in their prosecution of criminal violations of the NAGPRA.**

**Question 20:** Tribes have significant untapped energy potential on their lands, but face institutional barriers to developing these resources. Tribes must have the ability to determine their own energy futures – renewable or otherwise. If confirmed, how will you support Tribes in accessing funding, technical assistance, and streamlined permitting processes for energy projects that Tribes want to pursue?

**Response: In my experience as Governor and working with the North Dakota Tribes, Tribes are not alone in also facing significant bureaucratic hurdles that impede the responsible development of their energy resources. All too often administrative responsibility for processing leases, permits, and communitization agreements, among other permitting requirements, are split among several Departmental bureaus, which may further complicate the actual development of resources. If confirmed, I will reinvigorate efforts to streamline this permitting and explore the use of all Tribal energy development tools that Congress had provided to assist in the responsible permitting and development of these important resources.**

**Question 21:** In 2021, the Department launched the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative. The Department held listening sessions across the country with survivors and their families. If confirmed, will you commit to continuing this work, including advocating for additional funding in the President’s budget and supporting federal legislation?

**Response: I know the history of Federal Indian Board Schools is incredibly painful for many, and that the former Secretary of the Interior worked hard to shed light on this important issue. While many of the recommendations from the investigative report associated with this initiative are not within the administrative jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior, I look forward to reviewing those recommendations and if confirmed, I will work with you on this important matter.**

**Questions from Senator James E. Risch**

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**Question 1:** Idaho is nicknamed the Gem State, but is also home to significant deposits of hardrock minerals as well, such as gold, silver, phosphate, antimony, cobalt, and many others. Given the skyrocketing demand for minerals in the energy transition and the national security risks of increasing reliance on foreign countries, these mineral resources should be a boon. However, regulations under past administrations have made it nearly impossible to extract and process these minerals.

- a. Will you commit to working with Idaho and industry to find ways to increase responsible mineral production on federal lands?

**Response: Our nation is home to extensive mineral resources that are developed under world-leading environmental and labor standards. These minerals power our world, yet many deposits here on U.S. soil have been untapped or unexplored due to onerous and duplicative permitting processes. As a result, global adversaries take advantage of the lagging U.S. mineral supply chain, and our mineral import dependence grows. We have the technology and capabilities to extract minerals here at home in a safe and environmentally conscious way, and if confirmed, I look forward to working with all stakeholders to increase responsible mineral production on federal lands.**

**Question 2:** Outdoor recreation is a multi-billion dollar industry in the state of Idaho, and relies heavily on our vast public lands and spirit of collaboration with other multiple uses and local residents. However, the past administration felt it was necessary to pit various multiple uses against each other with their misguided public lands rule.

- a. Given your support for resource development on public lands, do you believe that various multiple uses including recreation, mining, grazing, and timber harvest can coexist?

**Response: I believe that these various multiple uses can generally coexist on federal lands. While there are certainly some specific instances in which different uses can be in conflict, it is my commitment to find ways to avoid such conflict when possible and fully carry out the statutory directive of multiple use in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.**

- b. If confirmed, will you commit to prioritize community and industry input to support local economies and multiple use lands?

**Response: Land management decisions are often inherently local decisions, and it is my commitment to listen to states, local governments, Tribes, stakeholders, and affected communities when making these important decisions.**

**Question 3:** Across the West, grazing on public lands has become stymied by increasingly inflexible federal regulations where on-the-ground management is largely prevented. Particularly in areas with repeated fire history, BLM needs the flexibility to adaptively manage fuel loads through grazing.

- a. Can I count on you to work with me to increase flexibility and reduce fire risk for grazing on BLM lands?

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**Response: Yes. BLM land managers should avail themselves of all authorities and tools available to address fire risk, especially where doing so can be mutually beneficial for other uses pursuant to BLM’s multiple use and sustained yield mandate under FLPMA, such as selective grazing to reduce wildfire fuel loads.**

**Question 4:** As authorized by Congress, the federal dams in the Northwest provide a tremendous amount of power to ratepayers in my state, as well as transportation of various products and other benefits. This electricity is affordable, clean, reliable, and dependable and should not be used as a political football as millions of people in our region face affordability, resource adequacy, and grid reliability challenges. Despite this, hydropower dams in the Northwest were constantly targeted by the last administration.

- a. Are you supportive of our hydropower resources and can I count on the opportunity to engage with you on how to correct the numerous ill-conceived promises of the Biden Administration when it comes to Northwest hydropower as it relates to the Department of Interior?

**Response: Hydropower is one of the most important and affordable forms of electricity in this Nation. The Bureau of Reclamation, within the Department of the Interior, is the second leading domestic producer of hydropower while the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is the leading producer. These two agencies, along with the Department of Energy’s Bonneville Power Administration, form the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS), which generates and delivers approximately one-third of the electricity used in the Pacific Northwest. The FRCPS’s 31 hydroelectric projects help provide an economic backbone to the region and allow the Columbia and Snake Rivers to continue as multiple use working rivers. At a time when our Nation’s electricity needs will continue to grow at exponential rates, it makes little sense to undermine existing and proven federal hydropower resources. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and my federal partners in other departments and agencies on the future of these facilities.**

**Question 5:** Idaho has many different species in varying levels of protection under the Endangered Species Act, like grizzly bears. Unfortunately, the status of these species is stagnant, without regard to their actual recovery goals. If confirmed, will you work with local wildlife managers to accurately assess the status of these species, and adjust ESA listings as needed?

**Response: As a former Governor, I know that states are the leaders in wildlife management and protection and are vitally important partners with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in developing management and recovery strategies backed by the best available science. I commit to working with states to determine the appropriate status of those species as directed by the Endangered Species Act.**

**Questions from Senator Ron Wyden**

**Question 1:** Oregon is a diverse state and in rural, southeast Oregon we have a treasured landscape—the Owyhee—where there has been longstanding conflict between tribes, ranchers, environmentalists, outdoor recreationists, and the federal government. These stakeholders have

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coalesced around a vision for the future of the landscape that I have championed in legislation. Representative Cliff Bentz and I have committed to working to pass that legislation this Congress. Will you commit to supporting this locally-crafted effort and implementing the legislation as intended once passed?

**Response: I believe it is important for public land management solutions to include significant collaboration that considers local input for those who are closest to the land. Should legislation be signed into law, I will work to faithfully implement the law.**

**Question 2:** It has been reported this afternoon that you “pledged to work with states in exploring ways public lands can be used to help address housing shortages. And [you] vowed careful consultation with state and local interests on some issues of land management, responding to Republicans who say local interests were disregarded in some national monument designations.” I want to make sure this sort of respect for local interests expands to places that do not want energy development and who want wilderness or other special designations. Will it?

**Response: If confirmed, I will commit to managing our nation’s public lands in accordance with all applicable laws, including the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, which includes local input.**

**Question 3:** In the first Trump administration, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke undertook a massive “review” of Antiquities Act designations and tried to shrink popular national monuments. This move was illegal and hugely unpopular– do you plan to undertake any similar review of existing national monuments?

**Response: The Antiquities Act of 1906 grants the President the authority to designate or change monument boundaries.**

**Question 4:** I support the authority Congress gave the President to identify the need to protect special places in our nation using the Antiquities Act. I also believe that only Congress has the ability to eliminate national monuments. If it chooses to do so, it is likely doing so in response to local constituent input. There must be a careful balance between local and national interests because these public lands are owned by all Americans. Will you help direct the Trump Administration to support this careful balance?

**Response: If requested by the President, I will advise him to consider all factors in accordance with the Antiquities Act of 1906.**

**Question 5:** Will you commit to increasing wildfire response capabilities within the Department of the Interior, including supporting enhanced fair pay for wildland firefighters, and ensuring that wildfire response and recovery is unhindered by political interference?

**Response: I believe that we should give our wildland firefighters every authority possible to achieve their mission and enhance their capabilities to combat dangerous and costly wildfires that threaten our communities. If confirmed I will work with each of the several**

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**entities within DOI responsible for wildfire management and response to ensure that those entities and their firefighters that serve our communities have the tools and resources that they need to respond to the threat of wildfires safely and effectively.**

**Question 6:** Please explain how you plan to address the hazardous fuels backlog on federal public lands when much of the fire risk is the result of hazardous material that has little commercial value?

**Response: If confirmed, I will work to ensure that the organizations within the Department of the Interior have the regulatory flexibility to reduce hazardous materials and conduct fuels treatments wherever appropriate, and that those organizations identify opportunities where the reduction of fuel materials may also yield a benefit to the American taxpayer.**

**Question 7:** One of the premier pieces of legislation passed last congress originated in this committee: EXPLORE Act. I was a proud sponsor of a core component of that bill, Recreation Not Red-Tape, as were other members of the committee. How do you plan to implement critical legislation like the EXPLORE Act and be responsive to legislative deadlines and inquiries on its progress?

**Response: Outdoor recreation is good for the economy, and it is good for the health of Americans. Congress acknowledged this last year with the passage of the EXPLORE Act. As Governor of North Dakota, I established a state office of outdoor recreation to ensure comprehensive planning and execution of successful policies, strategies, and initiatives to maximize the impact of the \$1.3 billion outdoor recreation economy in my state. The outdoor recreation economy contributes more than \$1.3 trillion to our national GDP. If confirmed, the implementation of the EXPLORE Act will be a priority for me, just like promoting outdoor recreation was a priority for me as Governor.**

**Question 8:** You have shared your belief in the importance of multiple uses of public lands. Are some uses more important than other uses? How do you measure that?

**Response: If confirmed, I will look to the definition of multiple use provided by Congress in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, codified at 43 U.S.C. 1702(c), in evaluating the importance of various uses of public land. In short, multiple use means the management of the public lands and resources so they are used in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people.**

**Question 9:** The Department of the Interior recently misinterpreted the law and made the truly unfortunate decision to approve an application to develop a new tribal casino in Medford. This decision harms other Oregon tribes and ignites a gambling arms race in my state. Will you work with me to look at all options available to the Department to address this flawed casino approval and mitigate the resulting harm to Oregon tribes and communities?

**Response: If confirmed, I will work with you to examine and review what options, if appropriate, are available with respect to this decision.**

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**Question 10:** Will you commit to requesting an increase in Bureau of Indian Affairs funding as compared to current levels to an amount sufficient to meet the U.S. Government's trust and treaty obligations to tribes?

**Response: If confirmed, I will commit to working with stakeholders to ensure that the Department requests and expends the appropriate amount of funding to help meet Tribal needs.**

**Question 11:** The U.S. is facing increasing demand for electricity from households and businesses. Tax preferences for oil, gas, and clean energy help deploy new energy projects quickly and at lower costs. Is the U.S. going to produce more or less energy over the next few years if Republicans repeal the Inflation Reduction Act incentives?

**Response: President Trump has been clear about his promise to increase domestic energy production, both to lower costs for American consumers and to make America energy dominant across the globe. However, new energy projects are hindered by inefficient permitting. If confirmed, I look forward to supporting President Trump's agenda by cutting unnecessary red tape and implementing the law as enacted by Congress.**

**Question 12:** Experts at the Treasury Department, the Department of Energy, and the Department of Agriculture collaborate to develop and administer clean fuel standards and rules for biofuels and renewable natural gas. As energy czar, how will you support this work?

**Response: The Department of Interior has no statutory role as it relates to the Renewable Fuels Standard (RFS). The National Energy Council will serve as a forum for federal agencies with statutory authorities relating to energy policy to coordinate, improve policymaking efficiency, and reduce duplication and redundancy. I will facilitate that coordination but will not prejudge nor direct agencies that have explicit statutory authorities granted by Congress regarding the RFS or other biofuel-related policies.**

**Question 13:** You have raised concerns about impacts that energy tax incentives passed in the Inflation Reduction Act are having on the amount of available baseload power in the United States. You have also agreed that the combination of renewable energy and battery storage is the future to achieving baseload power, but until we have enough energy storage we will need to rely on fossil fuels. Will you protect the incentives, and the jobs they created, that allow our nation and economy to transition to renewable energy and energy storage?

**Response: The Constitution grants revenue powers to Congress in Article I. The Department of the Interior will have no role in implementing, much less legislating, these tax policies. If confirmed, I will implement the statutes enacted by Congress that direct actions by the Department of Interior.**

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**Question 14:** Baseload power is critically important especially as energy demand is on the rise, and it is important to optimize the energy resources we already have. Will you support existing tax credits that incentivize energy efficiency?

**Response: The Constitution grants revenue powers to Congress in Article I. The Department of the Interior will have no role in implementing, much less legislating, these tax policies. If confirmed, I will implement the statutes enacted by Congress that direct actions by the Department of the Interior.**

**Question 15:** Energy affordability is of paramount importance. According to a new analysis, repeal of the Inflation Reduction Act would raise energy prices by an average of 10% for consumers across the country. In some states it would be much higher—over \$250/year for households in four states, for example. How will you ensure Americans continue to enjoy the clean energy and energy-saving benefits that will lower costs while ensuring cleaner air and water? In what ways will the administration advance the development of low-carbon and low-cost energy sources?

**Response: The Department of the Interior oversees America’s public lands and natural resources held in the public trust. If confirmed, I will implement the laws concerning energy development on public lands as enacted by Congress.**

**Question 16:** You reportedly played a role in facilitating a closed-door meeting where President-elect Trump promised fossil fuel executives he would eliminate oil regulations for them if they donated \$1 billion to his campaign. Have you ever played any role in meetings between oil executives and President-elect Trump where both public policy and campaign contributions were discussed?

**Response: President Trump is a leader who understands energy security means national security and economic prosperity. Given the importance of energy production, President Trump routinely talks about the subject at rallies, in media interviews, on social media, and in non-public settings. His Energy Dominance message is consistent regardless of venue. I’ve previously condemned insinuations in media interviews that were made about the referenced meeting, and I respectfully reject the characterization above.**

**Question 17:** Will you recuse yourself from overseeing the federal oil and gas leasing program due to your financial investments and relationships with oil executives like Harold Hamm?

**Response: We worked diligently with the OGE to reach an agreement that I will follow.**

**Question 18:** President Biden recently took action to withdraw 250 million acres of federal waters off the coast of California, Oregon and Washington from new oil and gas development. It was an action with strong local support and one I pursued on behalf of Oregon’s coastal communities in my state at their request. Can you assure me that you will respect the strong

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regional and local interest and will not take any actions to develop new oil and gas off the West Coast?

**Response: The authority surrounding withdrawals and rescissions of these withdrawals on the Outer Continental Shelf has been granted by Congress to the President in the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act.**

**Question 19:** Will you commit to ensuring the Department of the Interior responds to all Freedom of Information Act requests as expeditiously as possible?

**Response: I will follow all applicable laws with respect to the Freedom of Information Act.**

**Question 20:** Congress passed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, CHIPS and Science Act, and Inflation Reduction Act, which are creating significant jobs and growth across the U.S. The DOI is responsible for administering billions of dollars from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act. Will you support the implementation of these laws in ways that support the new American jobs they have created?

**Response: If confirmed, I will implement the laws as enacted by Congress.**

**Question 21:** The Department of the Interior signed a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Labor to apply high-road labor standards to all Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funded projects. Will you uphold these standards?

**Response: If confirmed, I will implement the laws as enacted by Congress.**

**Question 22:** Will you prevent any political interference in science-based decision-making processes within the agency including, but not limited to, Endangered Species Act listing, delisting and critical habitat designations?

**Response: If confirmed, I will implement the laws as enacted by Congress.**

**Questions from Senator Steve Daines**

**Question 1:** Governor Burgum, Montana faces serious hurdles to implementing forest management projects due to litigation. This situation was exacerbated in 2015 when the Ninth Circuit ruled in *Cottonwood Environmental Law Center v. U.S. Forest Service*, that a forest plan was an ongoing federal action. This creates a cyclical procedural requirement to consult under the Endangered Species Act after a new species is listed, new critical habitat is designated, or “new information” is found. Across states in the Ninth Circuit, we have seen hundreds of projects delayed while the Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service attempted to meet an ambiguous standard with no on-the-ground impact. I have introduced legislation that would fix this disastrous decision. Will you commit to working with Congress to ensure a permanent solution is found either through administrative action or through this legislative fix?

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**Response: I know this is an important issue and if confirmed, I will work with you to examine and review what options, if appropriate, are available with respect to this decision.**

**Question 2:** Governor Burgum, we have seen a rise of serial litigators who weaponize the courts to delay forest management projects until they are no longer economically viable. In some cases, we have seen irreparable harm result when wildfires burned forest management project areas that were on hold. These litigants are often working on the taxpayer's dime, receiving attorney's fees under the Equal Access to Justice Act and payments from the Judgement Fund. Sue-and-settle practices established by the Obama administration and revived under the Biden administration further incentivized these litigants. President-elect Trump has made clear his intent to increase accountability and transparency within federal agencies and reduce our federal deficit. Do you believe litigation reform will play a role in this?

**Response: If confirmed, I will work to restore transparency to this process.**

**Question 3:** Governor Burgum, the Mineral Leasing Act requires the Bureau of Land Management to hold quarterly oil and gas lease sales. Do you agree that the BLM should follow existing law and return to regularly held quarterly lease sale in Montana and other oil and gas producing states?

**Response: Yes. If confirmed, I will return to the practices of the Trump Administration of holding quarterly lease sales as required by the Mineral Leasing Act.**

**Question 4:** Governor Burgum, as discussed during the hearing, our National Parks are the crown jewels of our beautiful country. Will you commit to working with me to support national park units, both the frequently visited parks like Glacier and Yellowstone and the smaller parks like Little Bighorn Battlefield and Grant-Kohrs Ranch?

**Response: Yes. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and Congress to support our National Park System.**

**Question 5:** Governor Burgum, do you agree that one of the ways to increase domestic energy production while also reducing permitting delays and environmental footprints is to leverage existing assets, including expanding existing pipelines and transmission lines, or through innovative technology to increase existing well production and re-process mine waste?

**Response. Yes. Technological innovation is a critical aspect of responsible energy development - it not only creates jobs but helps reduce consumer costs as energy demand grows. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you on these initiatives.**

**Question 6:** Governor Burgum, the Bureau of Reclamation is currently working to address the catastrophic failure of two siphons from the St. Mary River that are a critical part of the Milk River Project that provides water to irrigators on Montana's Hi-Line. Will you work with Reclamation and the farmers and ranchers on the Hi-Line and use all available resources at your disposal to ensure the repairs are completed as quickly as possible?

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**Response: If confirmed, I will work with you and your constituents to help expedite, as practicable, the process recently initiated by the Bureau of Reclamation to repair the siphons and restore water supply.**

**Question 7:** Governor Burgum, as you know the United States and the Department of the Interior have a trust responsibility to protect the rights, lands, and resources of Native American tribes. Will you commit to ensuring that trust responsibility is met, curbing bureaucratic hurdles to distribute vital resources to Indian Country, and working with Montana tribes to uphold Tribal sovereignty?

**Response: If confirmed, I will commit to working and consulting with Tribes to address the bureaucratic hurdles they face to better improve the Department's delivery of programs, services, and resources to them, and thus better meet the Department's trust responsibilities to Tribes.**

**Question 8:** Do you agree that it is necessary for Congress to finish outstanding Tribal water compacts to ensure that both tribal and non-tribal water users have certainty over their water claims and usage?

**Response: If confirmed, I look forward to continuing working with you on finishing outstanding Tribal water compact and settlements.**

**Questions from Senator Mazie Hirono**

**Question 1:** Hawaii is the Endangered Species Capital of the World because of the large number of endangered species we have compared to our small landmass. These species are critical to our environment and to our culture.

Climate change, pests, and other factors are threatening our native species in Hawaii. During the last Trump administration, the Department of the Interior prioritized the gas and oil industry at the expense of endangered species.

Do you acknowledge that part of the Department's mission is to protect endangered species? If so, how do you balance that with a President who is focused on drilling at a massive scale?

**Response: Yes, the Secretary of the Interior is responsible for implementing the Endangered Species Act. This law was enacted in 1973 and its goals and objectives have been met for more than 50 years, at the same time drilling and other natural resource development have been happening. I am confident that, if confirmed, I will be able to continue managing imperiled species and resource development in a balanced manner, just as my predecessors have done.**

**Question 2:** During the last Trump administration, an alarming number of scientists left the federal government due to low morale and hostile work environments, including at the U.S.

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Geological Survey and the Fish and Wildlife Service. We in Hawaii rely heavily on science to tell us when to expect a volcanic eruption, how best to protect and conserve our native species, when high tides are expected to cover our coastal highways, and more.

Do you value science and if so, what will you do as Secretary to ensure that the Department retains scientific expertise?

**Response: I do value science. I believe it is important to consider the input of career scientists along with other career professionals to inform decision making. If confirmed, I will implement the laws as enacted by Congress.**

**Question 3:** Under the previous Trump administration, both Interior Secretaries ran into ethics violations. The first, then-Secretary Zinke, resigned following a number of ethics-related findings that were referred to the Department of Justice, including lying to the Office of Inspector General, using personal email to conduct official business, and using taxpayer resources for his brewery. The second, then-Secretary Bernhardt, was involved in a bribery scandal involving a major land deal in Arizona.

What changes will you put in place at the Department to ensure that past ethical mistakes are not repeated?

**Response: If confirmed, I will follow all applicable laws and regulations. Moreover, I have met with and will continue to consult with our designated agency ethics official on all matters related to conformance with applicable ethics guidance and law.**

**Question 4:** Congress passed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, which directed the Department of the Interior to administer billions of dollars while creating significant jobs and growth across the U.S.

Will you support the implementation of these laws and throughout implementation will you uphold the labor standards that were agreed to between the Department of the Interior and Department of Labor?

**Response: If confirmed, I will implement the laws as enacted by Congress.**

**Questions from Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith**

**Question 1:** Governor Burgum, the Chinese Communist Party has engaged in persistent, and overwhelming intelligence collection efforts across numerous targets in the United States, to include our critical infrastructure and strategic industries. The Department of Interior has a substantial fleet of Chinese-made drones that President Trump and Congress have taken steps to remove to reduce the ability of the CCP to use these devices as another vector for their intelligence gathering. As you are aware, North Dakota is on the precipice of creating a new program to replace the state's fleet of Chinese drones to help the state remain a leader in drone policy.

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- 1) As Secretary, would you undertake a similar program at the Department to allow the Department to benefit from drones without risking US national security?

**Response: The current drone program at the Department of the Interior was created, in part, by implementation of National Defense Authorization Act of 2024, which restricts the use of federal funds to purchase and operate drones from certain foreign entities. If confirmed, I will work to implement the law and examine any other drone policy in order to counter potential CCP and other malign foreign influences.**

**Question 2:** Since being enacted in 1953, the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act has served as the cornerstone of a robust offshore oil and gas program that Congress recognized in the initial OCSLA legislation and declared, "... a vital national resource reserve held by the Federal Government for the public, which should be made available for expeditious and orderly development, subject to environmental safeguards, in a manner which is consistent with the maintenance of competition and other national needs."

- 2a) Do you believe that President Biden's extensive offshore acreage withdrawals are in agreement with Congressional intent for the development of US offshore oil and gas resources?**

**Response: Our offshore oil and gas resources are a vital national resource which should be made available for expeditious development, subject to environmental safeguards, in order to meet national need. The Department of the Interior acts as a steward of these crucial oil and gas resources on behalf of the American people. Withdrawal of these vital resources limits access to these assets, drives innovation to other shores, and reduces our ability to meet the ongoing needs of the American people.**

- 2b) Do you anticipate the Trump Administration taking action to rescind the Biden Administration's acreage withdrawals?**

**Response: The President has made clear that responsible energy production is of the utmost importance to secure lower energy prices for the American people. The President has made public statements with regard to these withdrawals that impact our nation's energy resources.**

**Question 3:** As you know, the Department of Interior has been given the authority of managing the exploration and development activities associated with offshore oil and gas production. However, we continue to see examples where agencies in departments other than Interior have undue influence over offshore activities. One current example of this dynamic is playing out, is the National Marine Fisheries Service development of a Biological Opinion for Gulf of Mexico Oil and Gas Activities. It is too convoluted to get into the specific details here, but in short, depending on the outcome of the NMFS analysis, the offshore oil and gas industry could face

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debilitating restrictions to its operations based on very little conclusive evidence as to the presence of the Rice's whale in the central and western Gulf of Mexico.

3a) Under your leadership as Secretary will you commit to ensuring that agencies under your control will partner with NMFS on this effort to provide any needed information and work with the offshore oil and gas industry to provide NMFS with helpful information that will minimize operational disruptions while still providing adequate environmental protections to endangered species in the Gulf of Mexico?

3b) Do you believe there is a need to limit the ability of agencies to impose undue restrictions on industry based on spurious scientific claims?

**Response: As stated previously, expeditious and orderly development of the Outer Continental Shelf is stated in the law and I will implement the laws as enacted by Congress. I also agree that coordination within the federal agencies is important and I commit to working with my counterparts.**

**Question 4:** Financial Assurance

4) Do you believe that current lessees should be held accountable for all the activities and expectations that are required when a company owns an offshore oil and gas lease?

**Response: I believe a healthy and vibrant offshore energy economy for ongoing oil and gas and production is the best outcome for our nation. I believe all operators on the Outer Continental Shelf have an obligation to operate as safely as possible and comply with all federal regulations and requirements under law.**

**Question 5:** As Governor, you have been a vocal proponent of commonsense, streamlined carbon capture infrastructure development and deployment, including applying for primacy to transfer approval of Class VI wells to North Dakota. Captured carbon can be used for various uses, including enhanced oil recovery and other fuels, bioplastics and other polymers, concrete, and even carbonated beverages. Carbon capture has also been an opportunity for bipartisanship in Congress, including the 45Q tax credit as well as historic investments and regulatory support in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

**5) As Secretary and National Energy Council Co-Chair, do you commit to working with Congress and industry to continue supporting the carbon capture industry and collaborating with the EPA to improve the state primacy application process and the overall permitting process for American energy projects?**

**Response: As I stated at the hearing, as Governor of North Dakota, carbon capture was an important aspect of our energy development strategy in the state. If confirmed, I look forward to learning more about the Department of the Interior and how they can further support this innovative method of sequestering carbon.**

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**Question 6:** We have seen unprecedented investment in energy development, but we continue to see these projects get caught up in years of delay. These delays have real impacts in not only dragging out the process but also significantly increasing the cost of construction, which risks chilling investment in the energy sector. I am particularly concerned with delays around emerging technologies. American companies are on the brink of demonstrating a working fusion energy machine and I am concerned that the commercialization of new technologies like fusion will be unnecessarily delayed.

6) Can you talk about the steps you would take to ensure emerging technologies can deploy rapidly and at scale?

**Response: Government needs to move at the speed of technological innovation. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that the Department of the Interior is embracing new technologies to fulfill our statutory mandates just as American companies are also embracing new technologies to provide reliable, affordable energy.**

**Question 7:** Governor, you are in the exciting position to be the Secretary of the Interior and chair of the new National Energy Council.

7a) Can you talk in more detail about how you will help ensure an “all of government” approach to helping support innovative energy technologies like fusion?

**Response: As I stated in my response to a live hearing question from Senator Hoeven regarding the National Energy Council, the intent is for the Council to be a convening opportunity for agencies that have statutory authorities that affect our nation’s energy policies to coordinate. The goal, as stated by President Trump, is to reduce red tape and bureaucratic redundancy between agencies. Historically, presidents of both parties have convened similar interagency for a taskforce to serve a policy coordination function within the Executive Branch. Agencies will still need to act within their statutory authorities in the implementation of any policies in accordance with the law. If Congress directs actions be taken to accelerate fusion deployment using Department of the Interior authorities, I will implement it accordingly.**

7b) Many of the key issues related to commercialization, deployment and supply chain for these technologies involve multiple agencies – how can your office help coordinate USG activities and cut through the bureaucracy to make sure this sector thrives?

**Response: If confirmed, I will examine the Department’s current operations with an eye to improving efficiency, reducing red tape, and eliminating redundancy.**

**Question 8:** One of the great successes we have had in recent years is in fostering public-private partnerships. These partnerships are especially critical for supporting the rapid deployment of energy production. One interesting approach we have seen in recent years is the development of ‘energy zones’ that speed up the permitting process in specified areas.

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8) Can you talk about the opportunities you see for expanding on this concept to streamline energy deployment in pre-approved areas?

**Response: While there are benefits to energy corridors and other tools that could help streamline permitting reviews, I want to ensure that the Department of the Interior is not picking winners and losers by setting aside areas for specific types of development. Technology moves fast, and the Department needs to be nimble enough to adapt to changing technologies. Any tool that encourages a resource neutral, all-of-the-above energy strategy and furthers American energy dominance will be considered by the Department.**

**Question 9:** The 2018 Farm Bill created the Interagency Work Group (IWG), comprised of representatives from the Council on Environmental Quality, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Commerce, Department of the Interior, and Department of Agriculture. Congress charged the IWG with identifying and implementing improvements to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) review process for pesticides and engaging with stakeholders to help facilitate their input in these efforts. In 2022, the EPA published its ESA Workplan, outlining how it intended to meet its legal obligations for pesticide registration decisions under the Endangered Species Act. The IWG plays a vital role in ensuring that the strategies made under the EPA ESA workplan strike the right balance by incorporating perspectives from industry, growers, federal and state agencies, and other stakeholders while advancing practical, science-based solutions.

9) If confirmed, will you commit to working closely with your colleagues in the IWG to develop science-based policies that protect endangered species while recognizing the critical role pesticides play in ensuring agricultural productivity, protecting our nation's food supply, and supporting American farmers?

**Response: As a former Governor from an agricultural state, I believe that a strong agricultural economy is crucial to achieving food security for our nation. I know this is an important issue for you and if confirmed, I will work with you to examine and review what options, if appropriate, are available with respect to this ongoing matter.**

**Question 10:** Under the Biden Administration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reissued the "blanket 4(d) rule" which disregards science and hinders habitat restoration efforts under the Endangered Species Act by establishing a one-size-fits-all approach to all listed species. Rather than motivating stakeholders to invest in a species' recovery by lifting the most stringent restrictions when its status improves, the blanket rule makes states and landowners indifferent to whether a species is endangered or threatened, improving, or declining. This penalizes and discourages states and landowners from maintaining or restoring wildlife habitat, prioritizing bureaucrats over wildlife and the general public.

10a) Do you believe changes to the Service's implementation of 4(d) rules could produce meaningful conservation results for wildlife?

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**Response: I understand that many have encountered challenges with the regulatory implementation of the Endangered Species Act. If confirmed, I look forward to reviewing this matter more thoroughly.**

10b) Are there additional changes to 4(d) implementation you would like to see?

**Response: I appreciate your input with regard to regulatory implementation of the Endangered Species Act and I look forward to working with you on this issue.**

**Question 11:** Over the past four years the Biden Administration slowly began restricting the use of traditional ammunition on wildlife refuges.

11a) Are you concerned these restrictions create a barrier to entry for sportsmen seeking to recreate on public lands?

11b) If confirmed, how will you address this issue?

**Response: If confirmed, Access for America’s sportsmen and women to the Department of the Interior’s lands will be of paramount importance to my mission. Affordability of ammunition is an important aspect of access to our national wildlife refuges and other Interior Department lands. If confirmed, I will work with you, the sportsmen and women communities and others to examine the banning of traditional ammunition on wildlife refuges as well as broader access issues.**

**Question 12:** One of the most fundamental aspects of national security is food security. Without access to fertilizer, American agricultural yields will decline rapidly, which will have a direct impact on grocery prices for consumers. China and Russia control over 48% of the global phosphate fertilizer supply, while China, Belarus, and Russia together dominate 43% of the global potash supply.

Despite this significant control, the Biden Administration did not designate these fertilizers as critical minerals in 2022. The upcoming list is due this year from the Department of the Interior. In the current list, both phosphate and potash were excluded because they claimed they did not meet the criteria of being classified as “vulnerable to disruption,” despite bipartisan and bicameral support for their inclusion. With what we saw in the fertilizer markets resulting after Russia invaded Ukraine and geopolitical tensions with China, these are clearly very vulnerable to disruption.

If confirmed as Secretary of Interior, you will have a pivotal role to ensure the United States is recognizing the essential role that potash and phosphate fertilizers play in our agricultural supply chain and our national security. The U.S. Geological Survey is required to consult with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on this list, which would have been valuable in understanding the full extent of these minerals’ critical roles. However, the Biden Administration failed to do so.

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12) If confirmed, will you commit to working with USDA on this year's critical mineral list and ensuring our farmers and the agriculture supply chain have a voice during this process?

**Response: As the former Governor of an agricultural state, I understand the important role of fertilizers in achieving a secure domestic food supply. If confirmed, I look forward to reviewing this matter more closely.**

**Question 13:** Rodenticides are critical tools that farmers, ranchers, and others in the food industry use to protect public health and prevent food waste. Rodents spread disease, contaminate and destroy crops and food, and harm both indoor and outdoor infrastructure, causing property damage and electrical fire hazards. Many in the agriculture and food industries are concerned about the future of their access to rodenticides because of recent decisions made by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

13) As Secretary, how will you work with the regulated community to ensure that the consultation between the EPA and the USFWS required by the Endangered Species Act for eleven rodenticides includes the best available scientific and commercial data, and stakeholder input on the feasibility and effectiveness of measures to avoid, minimize, or offset the effects of rodenticides on listed species and their critical habitats?

**Response: As the former Governor of an agriculture state, I appreciate the damage rodents and other pests can cause the farming community. I know this issue is important to you and if confirmed, I will look into this matter further as it relates to the US. Fish and Wildlife Service.**

**Question 14:** In January 2024, the Department of Interior (DOI), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and U.S. Department of Agriculture announced the establishment of the U.S. One Health Coordination Unit (U.S. OHCU), and last week the U.S. OHCU released the first-ever National One Health Framework to Address Zoonotic Diseases and Advance Public Health Preparedness in the United States, following congressional directives in the FY2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act and FY2021 House Appropriations Committee Report. This interagency collaboration is crucial for a robust, coordinated federal response to issues at the human-animal-environment interface—especially to high-consequence zoonotic diseases that originate in wildlife and can spread to people and livestock.

**14a) If confirmed, will you commit to continue DOI's involvement with the U.S. OHCU?**

**14b) How can Congress best support DOI's efforts to contribute to the U.S. OHCU?**

**Response: I recognize the value of coordination between federal agencies, especially in the case of the health and safety of the public. If confirmed, I commit to learn about the**

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**specific role the Department of the Interior plays in this program and I look forward to working with you on the issue.**

**Question 15:** Federally-protected migratory birds often wreak havoc on livestock operations. Examples I frequently hear about from constituents include cormorants, egrets, and pelicans consuming millions of dollars' worth of farm-raised catfish from catfish ponds and spreading devastating bacterial and parasitic diseases to fish; and black vultures killing newborn calves. Additionally, many detections of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in commercial egg layers—a disease currently decimating that industry—and in other livestock sectors are attributed to spread from wild birds.

It is hard to quantify the magnitude of losses and adverse effects that livestock operations experience due to intrusion from federally-protected bird populations. Under current regulations, farmers lack the ability to fully protect their animals, because they are limited in the number of birds they are allowed to kill with a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service. Moreover, these protected bird populations do not actually seem to be struggling, but seem to be thriving to the point that they are disrupting farmers' abilities to produce protein for American consumption.

**15) If confirmed, will you commit to closely examining DOI's policies regarding federally-protected migratory birds, and work to ease the regulatory burden currently on farmers trying to protect their livestock and aquaculture?**

**Response: If confirmed, I look forward to working with farmers and wildlife experts to examine the current policies in place regarding the depredation of migratory birds and work toward a solution to this ongoing issue.**

**Question 16:** The Natchez National Historical Park, which is managed by the NPS, tells the stories of westward expansion, the Civil War period, and slavery through multiple federally owned and managed facilities. The State of Mississippi owns two historical sites closely related to those national park sites that can help fulfill Congress's original intent when establishing the federal park.

I introduced the "Grand Village of the Natchez Indians and Jefferson College Affiliated Areas Establishment Act" to ensure these two state owned sites can work in tandem with the Natchez National Historical Park. The Grand Village of the Natchez Indians interprets the story of the Natchez people, who were the original occupants of the area. The story of the Natchez Native Americans is essential to fulfilling purposes identified in §410oo. of Public Law 100-479 (1988), which established Natchez National Historical Park: "to preserve and interpret the sites and structures associated with all peoples of Natchez and its surrounding area from earliest inhabitants to the modern era, and including blacks, both slave and free."

Historic Jefferson College was Mississippi's birthplace, the intellectual center of the Old Natchez District, and served as a Freedmen's Bureau site after the Civil War. The site is important to the park's mission to "preserve and interpret the region's commercial and agricultural history, especially in relation to the Mississippi River and cotton," and to "preserve

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and interpret the region's social, political, and economic development with particular emphasis on the pre- and post-Civil War eras."

The stories of both sites are uniquely integral to understanding the Natchez area and have strong connections with sites the National Park Service administer in Natchez.

16a) Will you commit to working with me on the "Grand Village of the Natchez Indians and Jefferson College Affiliated Areas Establishment Act" in this Congress?

**Response: If confirmed, I will work with you to provide technical assistance on this bill.**

16b) Will you commit to continuing to review the historical significance of Historic Jefferson College through all materials submitted by the Mississippi Department of Archives & History to reach a determination that it meets the criteria for designation as an affiliated area?

**Response: If confirmed, I look forward to learning more about this important matter with the National Park Service and working with you further on this issue.**

**Question 17:** The mission statement of the NPS was specifically changed in recent years to include the work that partners organizations do to support national parks. The current NPS mission statement reads, "The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The National Park Service cooperates with partners [emphasis added] to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world." In this context, partners aren't limited to Friends groups, but also include a wide variety of organizations, including other federal agencies, state agencies, municipal agencies, non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations, corporations, and individuals.

The Vicksburg National Military Park has benefitted greatly from partnerships with the Friends of the Vicksburg National Military Park and Campaign as well as the Mississippi Department of Archives & History. These three organizations in Mississippi have entered into an agreement to work together to build and operate a new visitor center, museum, and archival research facility to support the Park. Through this partnership, the NPS will no longer be required to maintain a facility and will get the benefit of a modern interpretive center with significant financial contributions from the state government and private contributions. Without the funding, land, and technical expertise of these non-federal partners, NPS would not be able to adequately tell the important story of the Vicksburg campaign.

17a) Do you acknowledge and support the need for these types of partnerships to support the work of NPS?

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**Response: I believe it is important for federal land managers, including the National Park Service, to be good neighbors to local communities, including working with various partners to enhance the visitor experience, where appropriate.**

17b) Will you encourage senior leadership to support and not hinder these partnerships?

**Response: If confirmed, I look forward to looking into this matter further.**

**Question 18:** Not only does offshore oil and gas development bolster our energy security and provide good-paying jobs, but it also generates millions in revenue sharing for coastal states and communities. Currently, the Gulf states are treated differently than our inshore counterparts and get shortchanged with those revenues. The federal government splits the lease revenue from inland energy development 50/50 with the states and communities around that federal land. But offshore oil and gas in federal waters only returns about 37% to the coastal states. This funding can be used for storm mitigation, resiliency, and other environmental restoration projects.

18a) Do you think that is fundamentally unfair?

**Response: Federal revenue sharing percentages are established by law. I believe that revenue sharing with states and local communities has been incredibly beneficial at the local level.**

18b) At a time when we are all trying to figure out what to do about the skyrocketing prices for insurance and NFIP insolvency, shouldn't we be putting more money into storm protection and resiliency in our coastal communities?

**Response: The role of the Department of the Interior is to implement federal revenue sharing laws as passed by Congress.**

**Question 19:** We are proud of the contribution Mississippi makes to the country's energy security and to the economy through our tremendous oil and natural gas production in the Gulf of America, however since 2009 more than 30 corporate bankruptcies have occurred involving oil and gas operators that did not have sufficient bonding to cover their decommissioning liabilities. These bankruptcies often penalize unassociated Mississippi workers, subcontractors, predecessor companies, and increasingly the taxpayer who must safely decommission those bankrupt company's properties, so they do not become a hazard to our coast. This problem led to the Trump administration proposing new bonding regulations in 2020, finalized in 2024. Those final regulations do not allow a company operating offshore to go unbonded if there is a predecessor in the chain of title that can self-bond, because that would create an inappropriate incentive for bad actors to go bankrupt before properly decommissioning their liabilities. Section 5(b) of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) requires that compliance with the regulations issued under the law, such as those to decommission a company's properties at the end of the property's useful life, must be a condition of the issuance of any lease, or of any assignment or other transfer of any lease, under the provisions of the law.

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19a) Do you agree that giving offshore operators the option to rely on a predecessor company to decommission a property that predecessor no longer owns or controls will diminish investment that should otherwise go towards President Trump's goal of greater oil and gas production in U.S. waters, workers, and companies that are following the law?

**Response: President Trump has been clear that his goal is energy dominance and production and the good oil and gas jobs that occur for workers on the Outer Continental Shelf are an important piece of that goal. If confirmed, I will work to facilitate job creation, private investment, affordable and reliable energy production, and environmental conservation, consistent with legislation passed by Congress.**

19b) Will you commit to ensuring that any reexamination or rewriting of the bonding regulations will not eliminate the legal requirement to decommission a company's offshore properties or simply allow them to go bankrupt if other uninvolved companies can be ordered to perform that decommissioning instead?

**Response: As stated previously, I believe a healthy and vibrant offshore energy economy for ongoing oil and gas exploration and production is the best outcome for our nation. If confirmed, I look forward to reviewing this matter more thoroughly to ensure that our nation ultimately continues to attract jobs and capital to drive long term offshore energy development in our country.**

**Questions from Senator Catherine Cortez Masto**

**Question 1:** The seven Colorado River basin states are currently negotiating the terms for the River's Operating Guidelines that determine each state's future water supplies once the current Guidelines expire at the end of 2026. My colleagues and I have repeatedly stressed our concern that if consensus is not reached, then it will be left to years of litigation that will negatively impact many communities. It is imperative that the Interior Secretary bring the states together to prevent a crash in the system.

How will you ensure the Basin states reach a consensus before time runs out? If the seven states cannot come to agreement, what water management mechanisms and agreements can Interior take to stabilize reservoir water levels and provide greater predictability in water supply delivery?

It is incredibly important that you assemble a team of experts at the Bureau of Reclamation and as your Assistant Secretary for Water and Science who has a thorough understanding of Colorado River issues – AND that you make it clear to our communities about who is in charge of these negotiations. Do I have your commitment you'll do just that?

**Response: The Colorado River is a critical water resource for the seven basin states. It provides drinking water to 40 million people, is home to 30 Tribes, irrigates 4 million acres of farmland, including 90% of the Nation's winter vegetables, generates enough hydropower for almost 800,000 households, fosters recreational opportunities and contains**

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fish and wildlife habitat. The Colorado River is governed by what's called the Law of the River, a collection of compacts, federal and state statutes, court decisions, a treaty with Mexico and agreements between the seven states and the federal government, Tribes and others. Each of these items allowed for the development and allocation of the River and is a result of a series of negotiations between various parties. The seven basin states are leaders in helping find a long-term agreement post-2026. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the states, Tribes and other parties to foster further dialogue to help find a durable resolution to this pressing matter.

**Question 2:** I have long supported both legislative and administrative efforts to curb speculative oil and gas leasing on public lands. In Nevada, speculators have nominated tens of millions of acres for leasing, with little results except for greater expense to the taxpayers. Between 2006 and 2020, the BLM leased 6.9 million acres of federal lands in Nevada, yet only 39 wells were drilled there during that period.

- Would you agree that speculative lease holders are a drain on agency resources and a wasteful management of land that could be managed for other purposes?
- Would you agree that some lands should be prioritized for other uses, such as hunting, fishing, grazing, mining, recreation and among others?
- Would you agree that the purpose of leasing low and no potential lands is NOT to promote America's energy independence, but rather to pad investment portfolios?
- Will you ensure that our public lands are managed to reduce speculative oil and gas leasing and other spurious activity?
- Would you uphold existing policies that prohibit leasing on public lands with no or low potential for development?

**Response: Responsible energy development on our public lands are of great importance to me. If confirmed, I will ensure we follow all applicable laws and regulations when conducting lease sales and evaluating resource potential on our nation's public lands. The Federal Policy and Management Act directs the Secretary to manage our public lands under the principles of "multiple use and sustained yield" – with the aim of making the various resource values available to meet the present and future needs of the American people.**

**Question 3:** What is your role and vision with this new National Energy Council?

- Will the council be in support of all forms of renewable energy deployment?
- How will you balance this role with your role as Interior Secretary?
- Can you commit to ensuring transparency in the workings of the Council, including who is serving on and advising the Council, any potential conflict of interests, and what topics are of focus to the group?

**Response: As I stated in my response to a live hearing question from Senator Hoeven regarding the National Energy Council, the Council can serve a convening and collaboration function for relevant agencies that affect our nation's supply, production, and transportation of energy. The overarching goal, as stated by President Trump, is to reduce red tape and bureaucratic redundancy between agencies, so as to maximize**

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**domestic energy resources for the benefit of the American people. Historically, presidents of both parties have convened similar interagency forums or taskforces to coordinate policymaking within the Executive Branch. Agencies will still need to act within their statutory authorities in the implementation of any policies in their purview, including requirements for transparency and to comport with all applicable ethics laws and regulations.**

**Question 4:** In regard to President-Elect Trump’s January 7th comments that “We are going to have a policy where no windmills are being built,” there are companies in my state and across the West that have invested billions to create construction and maintenance jobs for wind projects on our public lands. Are these jobs and financial investments into our rural economies now at risk? Will you be pursuing a policy that no wind farms will be permitted or constructed during this second term?

**Response: As I stated in my hearing, the significant growth of generative AI is driving an increasing need for electricity in the United States. Having an all of the above energy mix is an important means by which to address this looming energy crisis, however ensuring reliability of the grid requires baseload generation. The Department of the Interior acts as steward of our nation’s public lands, and ensures that the responsible development of all of these energy resources can occur in order to meet our national need. If confirmed, I will adhere to all laws and regulations applicable to this generation, including policy directives issued by the President.**

**Question 5:** I have been seeking an update to Nevada’s terribly outdated Resource Management Plans (RMPs) to better account for changing public land management needs and to better identify lands to help communities address the housing crisis.

Now, more than ever, Nevada needs a cohesive and holistic state-wide RMP that is informed by robust constituent engagement and input so that all stakeholders understand how their livelihoods and access to Nevada’s public lands are impacted.

Will you prioritize completing a state-wide RMP that includes robust engagement with State, local, and Tribal governments?

**Response: Housing is one of many critically important issues facing western states, and I am eager to review the authorities of the Department of the Interior and work together with you and representatives from across the West to help alleviate the pressures of rising housing costs.**

**If confirmed, I will direct the BLM to continually review existing RMPs, including Nevada’s, to ensure that these plans are responsive to the needs of states and local communities, as well as the nation. Certainly, any amendments to RMPs will be developed with several opportunities for robust public engagement and governor’s consistency reviews, as required by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976.**

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**Question 6:** In 2022, a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals decision related to the Rosemont Copper project in Arizona upended nearly a half-century of mining precedent and created significant regulatory uncertainty for ancillary-use activities on mining operations.

Both the House and Senate have advanced different pieces of bipartisan legislation in the last congress to address the court's decision and provide certainty to existing and future mining operations on federal lands.

Do you support providing regulatory certainty to the mining industry and addressing the 2022 court decision that will enable the Interior Department to be a proactive part of the domestic mineral supply chain?

**Response: Ensuring regulatory certainty and supporting a domestic mineral supply chain is essential for U.S. economic, energy, and national security. This is something that I sought to provide as the governor of North Dakota, and if confirmed, I will continue to prioritize as Secretary of the Interior.**

**Question 7:** The United States is overly-dependent on foreign nations, like China, for critical minerals essential to our defense, transportation, aerospace, energy, and manufacturing sectors. We must ensure the nation's economy and national security are no longer reliant on adversarial nations for the supply and processing of these strategic materials – especially when the United States is rich with deposits of critical and rare earth minerals.

And yet, the process to permit and develop new mines on federal lands is incredibly complex and lengthy. In Nevada, it can take nearly 10 years to bring a new mine online.

What will you do to ensure that the permitting process for these projects is prioritized and visible at the highest levels of the Department, reflecting the vital national security and economic interests at play?

**Response: I agree that the United States needs to develop our vast reserves of critical minerals in order to free our country from its reliance on China and other adversaries. In order to effectively develop these resources, we must establish a federal permitting framework that adheres to predictable timelines and establishes clear standards for approval.**

**Question 8:** The BLM has been underfunded for decades, and that has led to a lack of staffing and resources that kneecaps the agency from fulfilling its multiple-use mandate in servicing all land users, including ranchers, outdoor recreationists and energy developers. I hear from communities from across my state there's not enough staff for law enforcement, to complete appraisals, to issue permits, or to perform regular day-to-day operations in the field.

Do you intend to hire more BLM staff? Will you seek increased funding from Congress to ensure the agency can better serve ranchers, hunters, outdoor recreation businesses, and the American people?

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**Response:** The Federal Policy and Management Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to manage our public lands under the principles of “multiple use and sustained yield” – with the aim of making the various resource values available to meet the present and future needs of the American people. As a former Governor who has had to staff up many offices to ensure the ongoing work of the state continues efficiently, I understand the difficulties in trying to hire and maintain staff to keep operations moving forward. If confirmed, I look forward to learning more about the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) challenges with regard to hiring staff to ensure that all users receive a timely decision or answer from the BLM. I look forward to learning more about the feedback of your constituents and the unique needs you are encountering with the BLM in your state.

**Question 9:** Next-generation geothermal energy technologies are available today to provide clean and reliable electricity across the United States. These projects create jobs in rural communities, including those in my home state of Nevada. However, the current process of approving geothermal development makes it difficult to plan, finance, and build projects.

- Would you agree to increase DOI and BLM staff resources with drilling expertise to prioritize the leasing and permitting of next-generation geothermal energy?
- How do you plan to improve the existing regulations for leasing and permitting of next-generation geothermal energy development?

**Response:** As I stated earlier, the forthcoming energy crisis in our country requires our attention. If confirmed, I will work to ensure all of the appropriate energy uses on federal lands, including geothermal, benefit from common sense initiatives that bring certainty and greater alacrity to the energy leasing and permitting process.

**Question 10:** The Fallon Range Training Complex (FRTC) expansion rests upon a responsible, bipartisan, and Nevada-generated solution to a host of competing priorities.

And as such, the law which permits the expansion, also tasks the Department of the Interior with fulfilling a substantial number of commitments.

These commitments range from items like completing a major land exchange between DOI and local governments, making public purpose conveyances to local governments, to tribal access agreements, and resolution of what is commonly known as checkerboard land (i.e. where federal lands and private lands are sited next to each other in alternating square mile segments).

- Can you commit that you will dedicate more funding towards implementation of the law, including adding staff in Nevada which are responsible for specifically for implementing this law?
- Will you commit that any and all planning, NEPA documentation, and realty actions needed to complete are done as quickly as possible, especially since this action was directed by Congress.
- Will you commit to meeting with affected local governments in Nevada to discuss their perspective on how to best meet the commitments of this law?

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**Response: If confirmed, I will work to fully implement all laws that Congress has enacted regarding the Fallon Range Training Complex that are applicable to the U.S. Department of the Interior.**

**Question 11:** Several Tribes in Nevada have had the rug pulled out from under them by BIA regarding funding for criminal detention services. I've been working with BIA to rectify this critical public safety crisis.

Do you commit to ensuring these Tribes receive adequate funding, support, and communication in order to prevent criminals from being released on the streets?

**Response: In my role as former Governor, working in partnership with the Tribes in North Dakota was important to me. I know that the Bureau of Indian Affairs has publicly announced steps to remedy the lack of law enforcement personnel in Indian country. If confirmed, I will be sure to get a better understanding of these challenges and develop solutions that prioritize public safety.**

**Question 12:** Do you have any conflicts of interest that would prevent you from fulfilling your duties as Secretary of the Interior? If so, how do you plan to divest and resolve these conflicts?

**Response: No. We worked diligently with the OGE to reach an agreement that I will follow.**

**Questions from Senator John W. Hickenlooper**

**Question 1:** Coordination between federal agencies is critical for effectively managing public lands and supporting outdoor recreation. How do you plan to ensure the continued success of the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR), and how will you ensure effective collaboration across agencies to support recreational access and opportunities?

**Response: As a lifelong hunter who also believes that getting outdoors is essential for your own personal health, I look forward, if confirmed, to supporting implementation of the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation through the many relevant bureaus at the Department of the Interior that advance recreational opportunities and innovations for the American people.**

**Question 2:** As you know, the Bureau of Land Management is responsible for managing multiple uses of 245 million acres of public lands. These lands hold significant value for a variety of productive uses, from grazing to recreation, from mining to ecosystem resilience, and from renewable energy to wildlife habitat. Do you support keeping land health and conservation on equal footing with other uses as part of BLM's multiple-use mission?

**Response: I believe that these various multiple uses can generally coexist on federal lands. While there are certainly some specific instances in which different uses can be in conflict,**

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**it is my commitment to carry out the statutory directive of multiple use in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.**

**Question 3:** The future of the Colorado River and the Southwest rests on the successful negotiation of guidelines for managing the river in 2026 and beyond. Over the past several years, Tribal engagement on water issues has become increasingly recognized as important for successful and equitable outcomes in the Colorado River Basin. Will you continue to engage with Tribes in Colorado and beyond on their water issues?

**Response:** The Colorado River is a critical water resource for the seven basin states. It provides drinking water to 40 million people, is home to 30 Tribes, irrigates 4 million acres of farmland, including 90% of the Nation’s winter vegetables, generates enough hydropower for almost 800,000 households, fosters recreational opportunities and contains fish and wildlife habitat. The Colorado River is governed by what’s called the Law of the River, a collection of compacts, federal and state statutes, court decisions, a treaty with Mexico and agreements between the seven states and the federal government, Tribes and others. Each of these items allowed for the development and allocation of the River and is a result of a series of negotiations between various parties. The seven basin states are leaders in helping find a long-term agreement post-2026. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the states, Tribes and other parties to foster further dialogue to help find a durable resolution to this pressing matter.

**Question 4:** Under the *Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act*, Tribes can contract with the Department of the Interior to operate federal programs serving their members. We have heard directly from Colorado Tribes that the Bureau of Indian Affairs is simply not paying Tribes under these contracts. The Southern Ute Indian Tribe in Colorado is owed over \$7 million for work performed under these contracts dating back to FY 2022. The agency attributes this backlog to understaffing. For the federal government not to pay Tribes for years for the work they perform has a significant impact on Indian Country. How will you work with me to address the issue?

**Response:** The Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) provides Tribes the opportunity to assume programs or services provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Assumption of a program or service is done through a model contract set in the ISDEAA. In general, the policy underlying the ISDEAA is to provide the contracting Tribe with the funding that the BIA would otherwise use to provide a program or service. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and the BIA to better understand and resolve, if appropriate, this particular matter.

**Question 5:** We know our outdated electric grid is a threat to the reliability of our energy system, driving up costs for consumers and risking blackouts. The dismal state of our grid is also putting us more at risk of extreme wildfires. The devastating and deadly 2021 Marshall Fire in Boulder County Colorado was partially ignited by a combination of high winds and hot aluminum particles discharged from power lines. In your role as both Secretary of the Interior

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and the nation’s “energy czar”, how will you ensure we integrate wildfire resilience into our land management priorities and our pressing need to update our electric grid?

**Response: As we discussed in the hearing, we have unfortunately witnessed in Los Angeles that wildfire can strike quickly and in devastating fashion. It is vitally important that all land management agencies at the Department of the Interior pursue aggressive fuels management activities to reduce fuel loads and limit the spread of disease. Providing clear permitting guidelines, including categorical exclusions for vegetation management under the National Environmental Policy Act, can also speed up these important risk reduction actions. If confirmed, I will also seek to ensure that our wildland fire teams are fully supported and prepared to respond quickly to fires.**

**Question 6:** In the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Congress directed DOI to study permit times for hardrock mines on public lands and recommend ways to improve efficiency and environmental outcomes. DOI determined the average and median time spent permitting public lands mines is 3 years, commensurate with allied mining nations. DOI also recommended early and ongoing outreach with directly impacted communities. Do you agree that listening, respecting, and incorporating community input early in mine exploration and plans can both create better environmental outcomes and avoid or mitigate potential permitting delays?

**Response: Proactive and meaningful communication with stakeholders and Tribal communities is vital to any project on federal lands, including mining activities. Early conversations build relationships that are mutually beneficial and invite input into the development that can result in refinements and improvements to the overall project that enhance environmental outcomes. If confirmed, I intend to follow all relevant laws and regulations related to permitting activities for energy and mineral development, which often include rigorous public engagement, including through public comment.**

**Question 7:** As Energy Czar, you will play a key role coordinating energy and critical minerals policy across the federal government. Last Congress, I introduced the National Critical Minerals Council Act with Senator Tillis to develop and implement a national critical mineral strategy and coordinate federal investments and research. Considering the vital role critical minerals play in U.S. energy, advanced technologies, and national defense, what steps will you take to better coordinate the development, funding, and implementation of a strategy to responsibly secure essential critical mineral resources both at home and abroad?

**Response: According to the 2024 Mineral Commodity Summary published by the United States Geological Survey, in 2023, imports made up more than one-half of the U.S. consumption for 49 nonfuel mineral commodities. The United States was 100% net import reliant for 15 of those minerals and China and Canada were the leading foreign import sources. The USGS plays an important role in assisting our nation identify location of these important resources, including areas where such important resources can be found in commercial quantities on public lands. In such areas where minerals may be found on federal lands, it is very likely that the commercial development of a locatable mineral will be applicable to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, the Mining Law of**

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**1872, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the Clean Water Act of 1972, and the Clean Air Act of 1970, to name just a few. Navigating the regulatory structures of these statutory obligations in these many different agencies concurrently is understandably daunting. If confirmed, I will work hard to find meaningful yet lawful efficiencies to reduce permitting delays, increase regulatory certainty, and promote access to our nation’s critical mineral resources.**

**Question 8:** How can the Department of Interior expand responsible development of clean energy technologies like solar, wind, and geothermal on public lands through intentional design of permitting and leasing processes and staffing and technology use?

**Response: The Department of the Interior can expand the responsible development of all energy technologies on federal land by reforming outdated permitting processes to provide better response times and create more durable outcomes on permitting decisions.**

**Question 9:** Next-generation geothermal energy is available today to provide 24/7 clean and reliable electricity over a diverse range of geographies in the United States, creating jobs in rural communities and enhancing American energy security. As Secretary of Interior, how do you plan to improve the existing regulations for leasing and permitting process for next-generation geothermal energy development?

**Response: The Department of the Interior can expand the responsible development of all energy technologies on federal land by reforming outdated permitting processes to provide better response times and create more predictable outcomes. This includes geothermal energy, which is an important part of our nation’s energy mix.**

**Question 10:** Governor Burgum, as energy czar you will play a key role in securing our critical mineral supply chains. However, there are reports that the incoming Trump Administration is considering new tariffs on all critical minerals, despite the U.S. lacking a domestic supply for many of them. Imposing tariffs without a clear strategy to secure supply chains amounts to little more than a tax on Americans. What is your plan to collaborate with allies to strengthen critical mineral supply chains and expand domestic processing capabilities?

**Response: I agree that domestic production and access to allies’ fairly traded critical minerals are essential to our national and economic security. If confirmed, I will review the Department of the Interior’s authorities to accelerate critical mineral production while protecting the environment, and, where appropriate, work with other federal agencies on ensuring robust and fair trade of these commodities with our allies.**

**Questions from Senator Alex Padilla**

**Question 1:** As we work towards developing more offshore wind in California, it is important that we meaningfully work with California Tribes to do so. If confirmed, how will you work with

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BOEM to strengthen tribal engagement and consultation, and co-management in offshore wind projects like those in Morro Bay and Humboldt?

**Response: As a Governor, tribal engagement was critically important to me. I worked extensively with Tribes, listened and had meaningful dialogue. If confirmed, I will continue this commitment and ensure that Tribes have an opportunity to provide input into this process.**

**Question 2:** The federal Central Valley Project and the State of California's State Water Project is a joint federal-state water operation that moves water to cities, farmers, and for wildlife. It is a very complex system that requires tremendous cooperation between the Interior Department and California. If confirmed, do you commit that you will work in cooperation with California on water management, including on the biological opinions that govern these projects, and not against the state? How do you plan to bring people together and collaborate across disparate interests to improve water management in California?

**Response: The Central Valley Project (CVP) and the State Water Project (SWP) form an integrated water supply project that captures and delivers water to agricultural operations, municipal and industrial water users and the environment. Lawsuits, subsequent and successive Biological Opinions and federal laws such as Subtitle J of the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act, along with other laws such as the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, have governed recent CVP/SWP operations. While this issue is very complex and ongoing, if confirmed, I will work with interested parties to help find affordable and reliable solutions to help bring about water supply improvements for diverse water uses.**

**Question 3:** Providing equitable outdoor access to all creates healthier people and communities. How do you prioritize competing access, recreation, preservation, and conservation needs of the diverse land portfolio under the Department of Interior? How important is it to prioritize outdoor access and recreation nationwide, including in urban and low-income areas?

**Response: I am committed to ensuring increased public access to America's public lands.**

**Question 4:** The Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership program is a critical and bipartisan program that supports park projects in neighborhoods where residents currently have few opportunities to recreate and experience nature. If confirmed, how will you prioritize funding for this program and guarantee that it continues to invest nationwide in transformational projects?

**Response: Programs like the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership program were created by Congress to ensure that some funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund Stateside Program are used for grants to low-income communities that would not otherwise have access to parks and other outdoor recreation facilities. As I stated during my hearing, I believe that outdoor recreation is good for the economy and for the health of all Americans. If confirmed, I will work with eligible communities to understand their needs and how this program may meet those needs.**

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**Question 5:** While Congress has recently worked to address pay parity issues for the federal firefighting workforce, this issue doesn't just affect firefighters. Unfortunately, similar challenges exist across a range of positions at the Department of the Interior, which are contributing to significant vacancies and affecting the federal government's ability to approve project permits, appropriately steward our federal public lands and waters, and carry out the Department's mission. If confirmed, will you commit to working with this committee on pay parity and staffing challenges?

**Response: The issue of pay parity for the federal firefighting workforce is especially relevant right now as we witness the tragedy that Los Angeles is experiencing. If confirmed, I will make it a priority to better understand this complex problem that impacts a range of positions and keep my commitment to be responsive on issues of concern to the Congress.**

**Question 6:** The lack of affordable housing and the high cost of living similarly affect staff recruitment and retention at federal agencies. If confirmed, will you commit to dedicating resources and prioritizing staff time to improving the housing inventory, for staff at the National Park Service and other Interior agencies?

**Response: One of the great challenges that we are facing as a nation right now is housing availability and affordability. This has a direct effect on the housing of our federal workforce. If confirmed, I will work with Congress and with local communities to find solutions to the housing shortage.**

**Question 7:** Secretary's Order 3362, signed by former Interior Secretary Zinke under the Trump Administration, appropriately prioritized migration corridor management and conservation. This effort has enhanced critical wildlife habitat connectivity and supported states' conservation efforts. If confirmed, will you continue implementing this Secretarial Order? Do you believe it would benefit the Department for Congress to codify the original Secretarial Order to ensure the Administration has the support and resources needed to maximize connectivity efforts?

**Response: The protection and conservation of migration corridors can be an important tool as part of an overall wildlife conservation strategy. It is important to work with states as the primary managers of wildlife resources to develop tailored approaches to each state's unique challenges, including the conservation of wildlife corridors.**

**Question 8:** Conservation easements provide mutual benefit for landowners, sportsmen, and the wildlife that depend on these landscapes. Easements are also an important tool for keeping working lands intact. Do you support the continued use of conservation easements?

**Response: Voluntary conservation easements are often used as an alternative to fee acquisition to help an agency achieve a conservation value while allowing the land to remain in private ownership. Private landowners have played a key role in protecting and promoting habitat conservation throughout the nation. As a life-long sportsman, I know**

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**firsthand the importance of conserving habitat to support healthy wildlife populations and I look forward to working with you on this important issue, if confirmed.**

**Question 9:** Many iconic national parks suffer from overcrowding and the number of visitors to America's public lands has significantly increased in recent years, leading to vehicle congestion, limited parking, and degradation of natural resources. Online reservation systems are an important tool for ensuring visitors have the space to explore the outdoors. If confirmed, will you commit to ensuring online reservation systems provide equal access to federal lands for all Americans and have transparent fee structures?

**Response: I believe that it is important to use technology to ensure the most effective management of our Nation's parks and other public lands. If confirmed, I will seek to fully understand the current reservation systems and work to make improvements, where needed.**

**Question 10:** The Department of the Interior plays a central role in how the U.S. stewards its public lands and stays resilient as a nation from threats both foreign and domestic. If confirmed, how would the Department of Interior safeguard and leverage its vast natural resources in order to bolster America's biotechnology innovation and resources, including valuable data?

**Response: Many of the statutes providing direction to the Secretary of the Interior with regard to developing resources on our nation's federal lands include policy mandates stating the importance of meeting our "national need." The federal lands and resources under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior belong to the American people, and should be harnessed to provide for the growing needs of our people. Increasing data usage and storage necessarily requires increased power resources, which in turn plays a role in our nation's forthcoming energy crisis. If confirmed, I would follow the law as it pertains to these critically important issues and ensure that we leverage our energy resources responsibly in order to meet our growing electricity needs.**

**Question 11:** It has never been more important to invest in America's public lands and waters to strengthen the nation's infrastructure and competitiveness, create good-paying jobs, maintain resilient ecosystems, and teach Americans about their country. If confirmed as the Secretary of the Interior, how will you work to document and understand the biodiversity on U.S. public lands, allowing the American people to better conserve these ecosystems and benefit from the resulting findings?

**Response: The Endangered Species Act is our Nation's law designed to ensure for the long-term conservation of our fish and wildlife species. If confirmed, I will obey all federal laws and regulations, including the Endangered Species Act, which ensures thoughtful consideration of the long-term conservation goals for many species.**

**Question 12:** The President-elect has weaponized the devastation that Californians are currently facing to falsely blame California's water policies for some of the municipal fire hydrant issues we have seen. Southern California actually has record water storage, and any water expert knows

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this wasn't an actual water supply issue as suggested by the incoming president. Are you committed to staying above the fray and collaborating closely with me and state and local officials to advance commonsense water policy and rebuild following these devastating fires?

**Response: As I stated in my hearing, we are all saddened to see the devastation caused by the wildfires in Los Angeles and we must work together to provide land agencies with all the tools they need to aggressively manage wildfire danger. I look forward to working with you and other policymakers on innovative solutions for wildfire.**

**Question 13:** As Senator, I have worked closely with several Tribal governments over the last four years to successfully advance proposals to protect sacred tribal land and support co-stewardship agreements between the Department of the Interior and Tribal governments. Recent uses of the Antiquities Act in California were supported by California's federal delegation, Governor Newsom, and local and tribal leaders. For example, we worked with the Yocha Dehe tribe to modestly expand the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument by about 13,000 acres to protect their sacred sites, and I was proud to join them in California as they signed co-stewardship agreements with Interior. The recently established Chuckwalla National Monument has overwhelming support from federal, state, local, and tribal officials, and was crafted with the direct input from the energy industry and ultimately earned their support. Governor Burgum, are you committed to respecting and expanding co-stewardship opportunities between the federal government and Tribes, and working with me and California Tribes to respect and protect Tribally-led National Monuments?

**Response: I look forward to working with Tribes and believe tribal input is incredibly important. Ultimately, the Antiquities Act of 1906 grants the President the authority to designate or change monument boundaries. Should a decision be made by the President related to a national monument, I will follow all applicable laws.**

**Question 14:** The Colorado River, known as the "lifeline" of the Southwest, provides drinking water to over 40 million people – half of whom live in California, irrigates over 5 million acres of agricultural land, and provides habitat for a diversity of species. If confirmed, one of your most important roles will be to work with the Colorado River Basin States and Tribes over future management of the River, including the post-2026 operations. Governor Burgum, if confirmed, can you commit to using your role as Secretary to encourage the Colorado River Basin states and tribes to reach a 7-state consensus on the post-2026 river operations? How do you plan to encourage the consensus necessary to achieve a lasting agreement?

**Response: The Colorado River is a critical water resource for the seven basin states. It provides drinking water to 40 million people, is home to 30 Tribes, irrigates 4 million acres of farmland, including 90% of the Nation's winter vegetables, generates enough hydropower for almost 800,000 households, fosters recreational opportunities and contains fish and wildlife habitat. The Colorado River is governed by what's called the Law of the River, a collection of compacts, federal and state statutes, court decisions, a treaty with Mexico and agreements between the seven states and the federal government, Tribes and others. Each of these items allowed for the development and allocation of the River and is a**

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**result of a series of negotiations between various parties. The seven basin states are leaders in helping find a long-term agreement post-2026. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the states, Tribes and other parties to foster further dialogue to help find a durable resolution to this pressing matter.**

**Question 15:** California is proudly home to 109 federally recognized Tribes, so the Department plays a critical role in working with California Tribes on a host of issues. Governor Burgum, how do you view the relationship between the federal government and Tribes, and if confirmed, will you commit to respecting tribal sovereignty and engaging in genuine consultation with Tribes?

**Response: As stated in longstanding Supreme Court decisions, and Federal laws and policies, the Tribes enjoy a government-to-government relationship. The Secretary of the Interior has a significant role in meeting the Federal government’s trust responsibility to the Tribes. As part of that government-to-government relationship and trust responsibility, genuine consultation with the Tribes is critical. If confirmed, I commit to respecting Tribal sovereignty and will engage in consultation with the Tribes.**

**Question 16:** The California Conservation Corps provides young adults with paid opportunities to work on environmental conservation, natural resource management, and disaster response projects, equipping them with hands-on experience, education, and job training. Widely regarded as a successful model, the program offers pathways to careers in environmental and public service sectors while addressing critical challenges facing the state. Mr. Burgum, if confirmed, how will Interior work with and build on programs like the California Conservation Corps to provide the next generation with opportunities to develop valuable skills and create job opportunities?

**Response: As a former Governor, I value state programs that provide experience, education, and job training to young people. If confirmed, I will look for opportunities to work with partners from states and other non-federal organizations in the stewardship of our public lands.**

**Question 17:** Increasing water scarcity throughout the West demands widespread changes to secure our water supply. The Colorado River Basin’s water shortage, the Great Salt Lake’s decline to record low levels, and California’s subsidence due to groundwater overdraft in the Central Valley are just a few of the many examples of long-term challenges demanding changes in our water use. In California, it is estimated that at least 750,000 to 1 million acres of farmland will need to come out of development due to water scarcity. If this land transition is not proactively managed, it could result in increased dust, pests and weeds, and widespread economic impacts in our communities. In response, the California State Legislature established the Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program to help regions repurpose agricultural land while providing community health, economic well-being, water supply, habitat, renewable energy, and climate benefits. Repurposing certain agricultural lands can help minimize the economic impacts of droughts and create new public benefits while ensuring our most productive agricultural lands

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remain productive. Will you commit to working with me to advance solutions to both increase our water supply while also reducing water demand via voluntary land repurposing?

**Response: The Colorado River is a critical water resource for the seven basin states. It provides drinking water to 40 million people, is home to 30 Tribes, irrigates 4 million acres of farmland, including 90% of the Nation's winter vegetables, generates enough hydropower for almost 800,000 households, fosters recreational opportunities and contains fish and wildlife habitat. The Colorado River is governed by what's called the Law of the River, a collection of compacts, federal and state statutes, court decisions, a treaty with Mexico and agreements between the seven states and the federal government, Tribes and others. Each of these items allowed for the development and allocation of the River and is a result of a series of negotiations between various parties. The seven basin states are leaders in helping find a long-term agreement post-2026. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the states, Tribes and other parties to foster further dialogue to help find a durable resolution to this pressing matter.**

**Questions from Senator Maria Cantwell**

**Question 1: Outdoor Recreation**

Mr. Burgum, nearly 20% of land in the United States is managed by the Department of Interior and a significant amount is used for outdoor recreation, which is a major economic driver, especially in Washington state. Outdoor recreation generates \$1.2 trillion in economic output every year and accounts for 5 million jobs.

- Will you support efforts to protect more public lands and waters through designations such as wild and scenic designations -- that will support the outdoor recreation economy and create jobs in gateway communities?

**Response: If confirmed, I will work with local communities to understand how decisions I make in my role as Secretary of the Interior can support their local economies, including outdoor recreation.**

**Question 2: Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)**

Mr. Burgum, thank you for the productive exchange at today's hearing. I really appreciated your comments on the importance of outdoor recreation to our economy and also to the health of both people and wildlife. These priorities are absolutely critical to us in Washington State, which is why I asked for your support for the LWCF. You may recall that permanent, dedicated funding for LWCF was the original energy/conservation offset established in 1965 and the leading piece of the Great American Outdoors Act, the signature conservation achievement of President-Elect Trump's first term that I worked on with many of my Republican colleagues for many years.

Passage of that legislation has had huge impact in Washington, protecting key outdoor recreation access at our National Parks such as the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, North Cascades National Park, and San Juan Islands National Historic Park and National Monument to fuel our outdoor recreation economy. Frankly, it has grown recreation access in every zip code across the country. LWCF has also made huge investments in sportsmen's access, wildlife

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habitat and migration corridors—in every state in America. You’ve probably seen that yourself in the Dakota Grasslands protecting our nation’s duck factory, as well as countless state parks, river and lake access points that allow everyone to participate in these traditions.

The Great American Outdoors Act ensured that historic promise of LWCF’s funding — which comes from the royalties paid into the U.S. Treasury from oil and gas drilling in the Outer Continental Shelf, not from taxpayer dollars — is allocated to priorities at the state and local level as well as to protecting our National Parks, Wildlife Refuge and other public lands in a locally-driven, bottom-up process according to where there is most need, urgency, and opportunity to work with willing landowners to protect the best of this country. It is highly competitive and projects always garner broad support in order to succeed.

- Do you agree that this highly successful program has a long track record of empowering communities, creating more access for hunting, fishing, and recreation, and driving successful conservation outcomes?

**Response: Yes. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was established by Congress in 1964 to assist in preserving, developing, and assuring accessibility to outdoor recreation resources and to strengthen the health and vitality of our citizens through greater recreational access. Today, the LWCF is primarily funded from receipts from offshore oil and natural gas development on the federal OCS and funds have been used, especially at the state level, to acquire and conserve important lands that promote recreational use, including hunting and fishing – including many youth baseball fields, campgrounds, playground, and other state park upgrades in my home state of North Dakota.**

- How do you view LWCF as a tool to maximize recreation and sportsmen opportunities and improve federal land management?

**Response: Land and Water Conservation Fund programs, including the State Program, can be utilized to ensure access to federal lands and offer recreation options.**

- Will you commit to continuing to support full use of the annual \$900 million of mandatory spending for the LWCF?

**Response: If confirmed, I will implement the laws as enacted by Congress.**

**Question3: Great American Outdoors Act**

Mr. Burgum, under the first Trump administration, Congress passed the largest investment in public lands in US history—the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA). Unfortunately, critical conservation funding authorized through GAOA expires at the conclusion of fiscal year 2025. GAOA is a critical tool to address the decades-old maintenance backlog on public lands.

- Do I have your commitment to work with interested Energy and Natural Resources Committee members to push for reauthorization of the GAOA before it expires?

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**Draft Response:** The Great American Outdoors Act, which President Trump signed into law during his first term, was a great step forward for our national parks and other Department of the Interior agencies. If confirmed, I will work to address the deferred maintenance backlog.

**Question 4: Tribal Trust and Treaty Obligation**

Mr. Burgum, you come from a state, like the State of Washington, where some tribal nations have treaty rights. In Washington State our tribal nations' treaty hunting and fishing rights are sacrosanct. Please provide separate answers for each of the following questions:

- Do you commit to upholding the United States' treaty responsibilities to tribal nations?

**Response: If confirmed, I commit to upholding the United States treaty responsibilities to Tribes, consistent with the legal authorities granted to the Secretary of the Interior.**

- What are your plans to ensure that the United States lives up to its trust responsibilities to tribal nations?

**Response: The trust responsibilities of the Department of the Interior for specific Tribes and for all Tribes are set forth in numerous treaties, statutes, Federal court decisions, regulations and policies that span several hundred years. What is often overlooked is that the Tribes are often in the best position to explain how their needs can be met. If confirmed, I commit to engaging with Tribal leaders, including through formal and informal consultation, to work with them on the best way to meet the trust responsibilities of the Department consistent with applicable laws, treaties, and court decisions.**

- If confirmed, what specific steps will you take to ensure that Tribal consultation is a meaningful and enforceable process, rather than a box checking formality?

**Response: I believe that actual consultation is the most effective way for the Department of the Interior to effectively meet its trust responsibilities to Tribes.**

- If confirmed, will you commit to working with Tribes on a government-to-government basis, engaging in meaningful Tribal consultation on federal policies that impact them, and honoring Tribal sovereignty?

**Response: I believe that actual consultation is the most effective way for the Department of the Interior to effectively meet its trust responsibilities to Tribes.**

- In the 118th Congress, several bills were introduced that would ratify tribal water rights settlements. What would be your criteria for evaluating and making recommendations to the Administration on proposed tribal water rights settlements?

**Response: Management of water resources among all constituent parties is a major responsibility for the Department of the Interior. If confirmed, I will commit that the Departments bureaus and offices which have duties and responsibilities implementing and managing water resources under the administrative jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior will make their best efforts to work with all constituent parties in water settlement**

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**negotiations. I will further commit that the Department of the Interior will work to fulfill its statutory and trust responsibilities in implementing and managing Tribal water settlements.**

- Will you commit to improving the implementation and enforcement of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and the protection of Tribal cultural heritage from looting, destruction, trafficking, and exploitation pursuant to federal law?

**Response: The protection of Tribal graves and cultural heritage is a solemn responsibility of the Department of the Interior and the Department of Justice (DOJ). If confirmed, I commit to working closely with the Attorney General to assist the DOJ in their prosecution of criminal violations of the NAGPRA.**

- In 2021, the Department launched the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative. Since then, the Department has held listening sessions across the country and produced two volumes of findings. If confirmed, will you commit to working with Tribes and advocates to continuing this work, including advocating for additional funding in the President's budget and supporting federal legislation?

**Response: I know the history of Federal Indian Board Schools is incredibly painful for many, and that the former Secretary worked hard to shed light on this important issue. While many of the recommendations from the investigative report associated with this initiative are not within the administrative jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior, I look forward to reviewing those recommendations and if confirmed, I will work with you on this important matter.**

**Question 5: Tribal Public Safety**

Mr. Burgum, public safety remains one of the most pressing issues facing Tribes throughout the country, the needs range from the need for more officers, detention, and judges.

- Can you commit that you will work with the Administration to address this need in the President's Budget and by removing red tape facing our Tribal law enforcement agencies?
- Do you support the Tribal Law Enforcement Parity Act that will allow Tribes to recruit and retain more Tribal law enforcement officers?
- If confirmed, what steps would you take to improve public safety on Tribal lands, particularly as it relates to the Department of the Interior's collaboration with the Department of Justice?
- If confirmed, what specific steps will you take to address the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples, particularly as it concerns improve interagency coordination on public safety and those agencies' investigative capacity to ensure Tribal and BIA law enforcement have the resources and support they need?

**Response: As I have stated before, in my role as former Governor, working in partnership with the Tribes in North Dakota was critically important to me. I know that the Bureau of Indian Affairs has publicly announced steps to remedy the lack of law enforcement**

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personnel in Indian country. If confirmed, I will be sure to get a better understanding of these challenges and develop solutions that prioritize public safety.

**Question 6: Tribal Fee-to-Trust Process**

Mr. Burgum, do you plan to take any actions that would change the fee-to-trust process for tribal nations?

- Will you commit to continuing to process fee-to-trust applications?

**Response: If confirmed, I will commit to continuing to process fee-to-trust applications consistent with the Department's legal authorities.**

**Question 7: Manhattan Project National Historical Park**

Mr. Burgum, Congress established the Manhattan Project National Historical Park in the Fiscal Year 2015 National Defense Authorization Act. This park is a unique partnership between the Department of Energy, which manages the facilities and controls access, and the National Park Service (NPS), which leads the interpretation. The park is also unique because it is located at three sites in three different states, including at Hanford in Washington state.

Since the inception of the park almost ten years ago, there has been an intentional effort by NPS, DOE, and the communities to work closely together across the three sites, and to avoid any appearance of preferential treatment towards any particular site. That was part of the rationale for locating the park superintendent in a neutral location, Denver. Recently the communities were informed on very short notice by NPS that the agency is planning on relocating the superintendent position to Santa Fe, in close proximity to the Los Alamos unit of the park. That decision has not been finalized yet, however.

- Would you please share your thoughts on Interior and the National Parks Service's role in supporting the Manhattan Project National Historical Park?

**Response: If confirmed, I will learn more about this specific park and the role the National Park Service plays in its management.**

I have significant concerns that NPS did not discuss this potentially significant change with any of the communities beforehand. The communities near the Hanford and Oak Ridge units of the park have sent letters to the NPS Intermountain Regional Director asking for further discussion before any decisions are made.

- Do I have your commitment that you will look into this issue, and not make any final decisions before the key community stakeholders at all three sites have had the opportunity to learn more about this proposed change, and to provide their input to NPS?

**Response: Yes. If confirmed, I will place a very high value on input from local stakeholders.**

**Question 8: Offshore Energy**

Mr. Burgum, as I mentioned at your nomination hearing, I am concerned this Administration's single-minded pursuit of oil and gas development above all could hurt the outdoor recreation

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industry. This includes concerns that some decisions will come at the expense of hard-won federal designations that protect our most irreplaceable federal lands and waters.

Protecting our shorelines is also vitally important to a coastal state like mine. An oil spill off our beloved coastline could not only cause terrible environmental damage, but it would also threaten Washington's maritime industry that supports over 174,000 jobs and more than \$45 billion in annual revenue.

- Do you support offshore oil and gas drilling in federal waters off the coast of Washington state or the Western United States?

**Response: Under the federal laws in our nation, I do not agree with the premise that we cannot support responsible energy development as well as other uses of the ocean, including outdoor recreation. However, as I have stated previously, the power to withdraw and amend a withdrawal has solely been granted to the President under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act.**

**Question 9: Wind Energy**

Mr. Burgum, earlier this month President-elect Trump declared "We are going to have a policy where no windmills are being built promised that "no new windmills" would be built in the United States when he takes office.

- What role would you have as Secretary of Interior in fulfilling incoming President Trump's promise?
- What role would you have as Chair of the new National Energy Council, in fulfilling incoming President Trump's promise?

**Response: As I stated in my hearing, the significant growth of generative AI is driving an increasing need for electricity in the United States. Having an all of the above energy mix is an important means by which to address this looming energy crisis, however ensuring reliability of the grid requires baseload generation. The Department of the Interior acts as steward of our nation's public lands, and ensures that the responsible development of all of these energy resources can occur in order to meet our national need. If confirmed, I will adhere to all laws and regulations applicable to this generation, including policy directives issued by the President.**

**Question 9: Western Water**

Mr. Burgum, Western water policy is going to be one of the most important and challenging issues you will face. In the state of Washington, we have unique water challenges in experiencing extreme flooding in the western half of the state and managing annual droughts that exacerbate water supply for our farmers in the eastern portion of the state. We also generate 60% of our energy from hydropower.

How we manage water is critical and a key to success is working collaboratively with the Bureau of Reclamation and developing consensus from the ground up with communities and water users.

- If confirmed, will you support ground-up, consensus-driven solutions to water management?

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- Will you support the development and implementation of technology, like Water A.I., that can better manage water supply, storage and use?

**Response: As a former Governor of North Dakota, a western water state, I am very aware of the importance of water supply certainty and the challenges to meet that goal. One of the best ways to meet that goal is through community-driven consensus so that water users and the communities that depend on them have widespread support for construction and subsequent operation and maintenance activities. Technological innovation can be an important tool in helping achieve that consensus and improving water management in many cases.**

The Yakima Basin Integrated Plan is a basin wide water project that focuses on balancing and fulfilling the needs of a robust agricultural sector, flood risk management, and salmon recovery. It's vital the Bureau of Reclamation continues to fund these projects.

- If confirmed, will you work to promote the need for water projects, like the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan and other irrigation and water conservation projects, to be considered in any infrastructure legislation?
- Will you commit to including funding for the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan in the Department of Interior's proposed budget?

**Response: The State of Washington and the federal government authorized the first three phases of the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, a bipartisan water use plan designed to help both agriculture and salmon. If confirmed, I will work with you and the rest of the Washington state delegation on issues relevant to the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan and the ongoing need in the Yakima basin.**

**Question 10: Fixed Climbing Anchors**

Mr. Burgum, the issue of access to wilderness areas in my state is very important, at places like the Enchantments and North Cascades National Park. The last administration proposed controversial policies that would prohibit the use of fixed anchors, a standard climbing safety practice, for rock climbing and mountaineering.

- How do you plan to go forward with the climbing policies that are now required by the EXPLORE Act and can you give me assurances that access to my state's iconic wilderness areas won't be restricted for rock climbers and mountaineers?

**Response: Outdoor recreation is good for the economy and it is good for the health of Americans. Congress acknowledged this last year with the passage of the EXPLORE Act. If confirmed, I will support outdoor recreation on our public lands, including activities like recreational rock climbing.**

**Question 11: Labor**

Mr. Burgum, DOI is responsible for administering billions of dollars from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act.

- Will you support the implementation of these laws as enacted by Congress?

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**Response: If confirmed, I will implement the laws as enacted by Congress.**

- Will you uphold the standards that DOI signed the Department of Labor to apply high-road labor standards to all IRA and BIL funded projects.

**Response: If confirmed, I will implement the laws as enacted by Congress.**

**Question 12: Federal Landscapes**

Mr. Burgum, under the first Trump administration, Bears Ears and Grand Staircase Escalante national monuments were dramatically reduced—the protected area was cut down by 85%. These are sacred sites and culturally important lands to tribes in the region. Despite overwhelming support to keep these areas protected, the Trump administration attempted to roll back protections to allow mining and oil and gas development. President Biden restored full protections to Bears Ears, Grand Staircase Escalante, as well as other monuments that were stripped of protection by the Trump Administration.

- In areas like Bears Ears and Grand Staircase Escalante National Monuments, do you believe the value of the cultural resources, such as sacred sites, and outdoor recreation opportunities these monuments protect outweighs their prospective value from resource extraction?
- Will you commit to honoring and upholding protections for our existing national monuments?

**Response to both questions: As discussed in my hearing, the Antiquities Act of 1906 was signed into law by President Theodore Roosevelt in order to give the President the authority to protect objects of historic or scientific interest that are owned or controlled by the Government of the United States. Ultimately, the Antiquities Act of 1906 grants the President the authority to designate or change monument boundaries.**

**Question 13: Protecting Public Lands in Alaska**

Mr. Burgum, I have worked to maintain unique and irreplaceable federal lands in Alaska like the Tongass, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and Bristol Bay, home to the world's largest sockeye salmon run. There have always been development pressures, but what we proved is the relatively small short-term economic returns are not worth hurting places that are like nowhere else in the world, and in the case of Bristol Bay, support a multitude of good fishing jobs.

I bring this up because I know you will be pressed on issues impacting Alaska. I hope you will consider in each case whether short-term and limited economic gains from a resource extraction project outweighs the long-term impacts to developing these areas.

For example, the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act mandated two lease sales in the Arctic Refuge. The Congressional Budget Office projected the oil and gas leasing program would yield \$2.2 billion. However, both lease sales produced little to no bidding interest and thus revenue. In the first lease sale held during the first Trump Administration, no major oil companies showed up to bid. And the sale generated a mere \$12 million — less than 1% of the total revenue that was projected. The second lease sale held last week was also a complete dud; not a single company

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bid – big or small. It appears that the private sector realizes that the economics don't support drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

- Governor Burgum, given these failed auctions, do you think any new lease sales in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge would result in more private sector interest or substantial revenues?
- And will you commit to meeting with all Tribal stakeholders before taking any actions in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge?

**Response: The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, signed into law by President Trump, mandated not less than two lease sales in the Coastal Plain area adjacent to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. If confirmed, I will follow all applicable laws and regulations.**

**Question 14: National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska**

The Western Arctic region in Alaska is also a vast one-of-a-kind place with immense oil and gas development pressure. The Western Arctic is a critical carbon sink, premiere tourist destination, contains unparalleled wildlife habitat, and has been home to Indigenous traditions for countless generations. The Department of the Interior just released a report and guidance that conclude that there cannot be development in the Western Arctic without harm to caribou and other key species, and it names subsistence as a “significant resource value” for the reserve that any development would jeopardize.

- Do you support Tribal subsistence uses of the Western Arctic, including the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A)?
- Do you commit to ensuring that those Tribal subsistence uses of NPR-A, including caribou are not jeopardized?

**Response: I believe energy production currently is and will continue to be compatible with allowing subsistence for Alaska Natives.**

**Question 15: Trump's “National Energy Emergency” Declaration**

Mr. Burgum, President-elect Trump has said that he plans to declare a “National Energy Emergency” on day one in office, with a focus on expanding domestic fossil fuel production.

- Do you believe that declaring a National Energy Emergency to increase fossil fuel production when U.S. oil and gas production is at an all-time high is the type of use Congress intended when passing the National Emergencies Act?
- What is the rationale this proposed unprecedented use of the National Emergencies Act when U.S. oil and gas production is already at an all-time high?
- Are you concerned that the National Emergencies Act to indiscriminately cut corners on environmental, cultural, and Tribal protections would be an ill-conceived and dangerous precedent?

**Response: There is an unprecedented demand for energy. Our nation has been blessed with abundant energy resources. I cannot speculate on future actions by the President. However, if confirmed, I will ensure the responsible development of our nation's onshore and offshore resources.**

**Question 16: OPEC**

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Mr. Burgum, I believe we need to face the reality and be honest that there's no way we can drill our way to full energy independence or dominance. Not as long as the OPEC+ cartel can manipulate world supply and hold great sway over our pump prices. Even though we are the world's largest oil producer, we do not control the vast reserves that other OPEC+ nations do, nor the globally-set price of crude. But we do now at least have alternative fuels. The driver filling up their car with electricity pays just a fraction of what they would pay at a gas station. An Energy Department study found that Washington state EV drivers would save around \$11,000 in fuel costs. Only by finally ending our over dependence on fossil fuel can we permanently secure America's national security, maintain affordable energy prices, and tackle the climate crisis. Please provide individual details answers to each of the following questions:

- Do you agree that OPEC+ has proven and technically recoverable reserves that greatly outnumber U.S.-controlled reserves?

**Response: The U.S. Energy Information Administration has stated that OPEC+, comprising 23 countries, represents 59 percent of global oil production. Many of these states are authoritarian, hostile to the United States, or may inflate or obscure their technical and economically recoverable reserves. It is not appropriate for me to speculate as to the veracity of their data. What is clear is that the historic levels of oil and gas production from the United States are positive for the American economy, reduce oil prices in the global market, and limit the ability of OPEC+ states to use their cartel to manipulate the global energy trade to avail their policy goals, which are often hostile to the United States and its allies.**

- Do you agree that the interests of OPEC+ countries like Russia and Iran do not align with our national interest?

**Response: As stated in my previous response, I agree.**

- Do you agree that the price of crude oil is set on international markets like ICE that respond to the global supply and production of crude oil?

**Response: Yes, oil is a global commodity and priced accordingly.**

- What level of increase in U.S. oil production do you think would meaningful impact the price of oil and reduce U.S. petroleum prices? Will this reduction result in meeting President Trump's campaign promise to reduce gasoline pump prices to \$2 per gallon?

**Response: We have already seen that the unprecedented growth of US oil and gas production since broad deployment of hydraulic fracturing technologies over the past 20 years or so has reduced oil prices and increased American soft power. There are many other factors beyond oil prices that affect retail gasoline prices, but reducing the price of oil will facilitate lower prices at the pump.**

- If confirmed, how will you help the Interior Department bring affordable fossil fuel alternatives to market?

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**Response: If confirmed, I will implement the laws as enacted by Congress. If Congress directs the Department to facilitate energy development – whether fossil or renewable – we will implement those policies accordingly.**

**Question #17: Unused Oil & Gas Leases**

Mr. Burgum, according to the latest Interior Department data there are over 10 million acres of existing onshore oil and gas leases that have been stockpiled, but are not producing, and there are almost 7,000 approved and available but unused permits to drill on those federal onshore leases.

- Why do you think these leases are not being used as they were intended to drill for more oil and gas?
- Why do you think these permits are not being used as they were intended to drill for more oil and gas?
- The size of these unused lands are about the same as Rhode Island, Delaware, Connecticut, and Hawaii combined, do you think its reasonable for these public lands to be off limits and unused for years at a time?
- Do you believe the Department of Interior should consider the disposition of this vast amount of public land locked-up in unused federal oil and gas leases, and if those unused leases are impeding other uses of our public lands and waters?

**Response: I believe a healthy and vibrant offshore energy economy for ongoing oil and gas and production is the best outcome for our Nation and for the American people, who have faced high energy prices for far too long. I believe all operators on the Outer Continental Shelf have an obligation to operate as safely as possible and comply with all federal regulations and requirements under law, which include lease terms that ultimately expire should they remain unused after a period of time.**