

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

May 14, 2026

VIA EMAIL

Dr. Caryl Brzymialkiewicz
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Dr. Brzymialkiewicz:

I write to request that you thoroughly investigate the apparent impermissible conflicts of interest faced by U.S. Department of the Interior (“Interior Department”) Associate Deputy Secretary Karen Budd-Falen. Recent reporting and Ms. Budd-Falen’s public comments indicate that she directly participates in livestock grazing policy decisions that directly and predictably benefit her family’s multi-million-dollar ranch interests, potentially violating conflict-of-interest law.¹ Additionally, Ms. Budd-Falen previously failed to disclose her husband’s \$3.5 million sale of water rights to a lithium mine whose viability depended on an Interior Department permit.²

All federal officials are required by law to discharge their official duties in the best interest of the American public—not personal financial interests. Yet, Ms. Budd-Falen’s obvious conflicts of interest and her failure to fully observe the important ethical requirements applicable to a senior position of public trust raise questions about her ability to impartially serve in the third-highest ranking position at the Interior Department. Accordingly, I ask that you promptly conduct a thorough investigation of and issue public findings and recommendations addressing Ms. Budd-Falen’s participation in policy decisions that directly benefit her financial interest and her adherence to all applicable financial disclosure obligations. At minimum, your investigation should address the following important questions.

1. Whether and the extent to which Ms. Budd-Falen or her family have directly benefitted from policy decisions in which she participated during her Interior Department tenure.

¹ Jake Spring, Trump official says she’s involved in policy changes that benefit her family’s ranches, video shows, WASH. POST (May 9, 2026), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2026/05/09/karen-budd-falen-grazing-policies-ethics-probe/>; Senator Cynthia Lummis, *Happy Trails: Episode 3—A Conversation on Responsible Land Management with Karen Budd Falen, DOI*, YOUTUBE (Dec. 16, 2025), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dq_bXwgTKxw.

² Lisa Friedman, *The Trump Administration Approved a Big Lithium Mine. A Top Official’s Husband Profited.*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 3, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/03/climate/lithium-mine-interior-karen-budd-falen-water-contract.html>.

2. The extent to which Ms. Budd-Falen's participation in policy decisions that benefit her financial interests occurred before or after March 11, 2026, or both.
3. Whether Ms. Budd-Falen's participation in policy decisions that benefit her financial interests violated any law, regulation, or policy applicable to federal government employees or Interior Department personnel.
4. Regardless of whether Ms. Budd-Falen had or maintains an actual conflict of interest, whether her participation in policy decisions that benefit her financial interests impermissibly creates the appearance of a conflict.
5. Whether the Office of the Solicitor's March 11, 2026 "limited waiver" adequately evaluates and determines that Ms. Budd-Falen's financial "interest is not so substantial as to be deemed likely to affect the integrity of the services which the Government may expect" from her.³
6. The extent to which Ms. Budd-Falen has fully and timely disclosed all financial interests required to be disclosed on OGE Form 278e, to the Office of the Solicitor, or otherwise.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

cc: The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

³ 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(1); *see* Office of the Solicitor Memorandum, Limited Waiver Pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(1) and 5 C.F.R. § 3501.103(e), (Mar. 11, 2026), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/documents/165c50e2-90d0-431e-ba32-9f8753359a1f.pdf>.