

August 15, 2023

TO: Joe Biden  
President of the United States of America  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

CC:

Jennifer Granholm  
Secretary of Energy  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Ave. SW  
Washington, DC 20585

Jocelyn Richards  
Assistant General Counsel for Ethics  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Ave. SW  
Washington, DC 20585

Teri L. Donaldson  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Ave. SW  
Washington, DC 20585

The Honorable Emory A. Rounds, III  
Director  
U.S. Office of Government Ethics  
1201 New York Ave., N.W.  
Suite 500  
Washington, D.C. 2005

**Re: Request for the Immediate Resignation of Secretary Jennifer Granholm**

Dear President Biden,

We, the undersigned, represent a group of nonpartisan organizations dedicated to promoting ethics and integrity in government. Toward this end, we request the immediate resignation of Secretary Jennifer Granholm based not only on her actions – her repeated apparent violations of federal ethics laws and regulations – but also on the ethics failures and legal missteps of her subordinates resulting from her poor example.

Secretary Granholm has disregarded and de-prioritized her ethics obligations at every turn. The litany of abuses of public trust are extensive:

- Failing to accurately report financial holdings,
- Participating personally and substantially in matters directly benefiting a company in which she had a financial interest,
- Inappropriately using her official position to promote products for multiple companies in which she had a financial interest or covered relationship,
- Abusing her position of authority and misusing government resources to advance partisan activities in violation of the Hatch Act,
- Signaling to career civil servants and senior political leadership under her command that policy objectives take priority over basic compliance with ethics and legal obligations.

Since Ms. Granholm’s responses to these allegations have often relied on some variation of “it wasn’t my fault,”<sup>1</sup> this has left the American public wondering where exactly the buck stops in your administration. Since you took office, your administration has continually touted its commitment to ethics, with former White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki, for instance, declaring that you are “committed to ensuring we have the most ethically vigorous administration in history.”<sup>2</sup> The current moment presents an opportunity to demonstrate to the American public that such pronouncements have meaning and do not merely pay lip-service to a very important aspect of your leadership tenure.

The recent revelations about Secretary Granholm’s continued financial ownership of Ford stock while acting to enrich – and at times even publicly endorse<sup>3</sup> – the company is egregious. However, it is simply the latest incident evidencing recklessness at best and intentional disregard for the law at worst. Prior to becoming Secretary Ms. Granholm served on the board of Proterra. So her decision to announce \$199 million of federal funding to firms tied to Proterra WHILE standing in front of the company’s premier product, an electric bus, shows no concern for appearances, the law, or your administration’s commitment to uphold an ethical culture. This incident was the subject of Congressional questioning of the DOE Inspector General during a hearing of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee.<sup>4</sup> More recent disclosures by the Secretary reveal her transgressions related to this matter were even more direct and flagrant. Not only did she participate in the SuperTruck 3 program that awarded millions to firms related to Proterra, but one of those firms, Ford Motor Company, received nearly \$25 million from this program<sup>5</sup> while her husband owned stock in Ford.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to her casual approach to conflicts of interest, the Office of the Special Counsel found that Secretary Granholm violated the Hatch Act in an October 2021 interview.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See Letter from Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm to the Honorable Joe Manchin (June 9, 2023), <https://www.energy.senate.gov/services/files/72B2D66C-996B-40BF-ABC0-523A69884F9A>.

<sup>2</sup> Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki, January 29, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/01/29/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-january-29-2021/>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Energy, *Secretary Jennifer Granholm and Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg Drive into the EV Future*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3NFGIgcMg>.

<sup>4</sup> Protecting American Taxpayers: Highlighting Efforts to Protect Against Federal Waste, Fraud, and Mismanagement, Hearing of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee (Apr. 19, 2023), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEJBsgFYzlk&t=4594s>

<sup>5</sup> Gabe Kaminsky, *Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm faces renewed ethics heat over finances: 'Unacceptable'*, Washington Examiner (June 14, 2023), <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/energy-environment/energy-secretary-jennifer-granholm-ethics-heat-over-finances>

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Energy, *DOE Announces Nearly \$200 Million to Reduce Emissions From Cars and Trucks* (press release) (Nov. 1, 2021), <https://www.energy.gov/articles/doe-announces-nearly-200-million-reduce-emissions-cars-and-trucks>

<sup>7</sup> See Courtney Publé, *The Energy Secretary Received a Warning Following a Hatch Act Violation; Republicans Want More Information*, Government Executive (July 13, 2022), <https://www.govexec.com/oversight/2022/07/energy-secretary-received-warning-following-hatch-act-violation-republicans-want-more-information/374204/>.

Several of her other statements and appearances raised concerns under the Hatch Act and drew complaints from nonpartisan organizations.<sup>8</sup>

Secretary Granholm's apparently lax ethical standards appear to extend beyond her to others in the Department she oversees. When confronted with multiple instances of Secretary Granholm violating STOCK Act reporting deadlines, a DOE spokesperson indicated that "DOE and the Secretary remain focused on tackling the existing climate crisis and delivering an equitable clean energy future that will bring cheaper power, cleaner air and good-paying jobs for more Americans," rather than, presumably, their commitments to ethics obligations.<sup>9</sup>

In another example, former Acting Assistant Secretary for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Kelly Speakes-Backman resigned "following months of lawsuits and inquiries from Congress about her conflicts of interest,"<sup>10</sup> as well as multiple complaints from nonpartisan watchdog groups about her relationship with her former employer and its member organizations.<sup>11</sup>

It also must be remembered that another disgraced deputy is senior DOE official Samuel Brinton, who served as the deputy assistant secretary of Spent Fuel and Waste Disposition in the Office of Nuclear Energy on Secretary Granholm's watch. Of course, it is well documented that, while serving at DOE, Brinton was accused of stealing luggage at airports on at least two occasions, pleading guilty in one case so far. Recent media reports reveal that one of these thefts occurred while Brinton was on official and taxpayer-funded travel.<sup>12</sup> Senator John Barrasso, R-Wyo. has asked the administration how the security clearance process missed Brinton's apparent proclivity for theft, given the extensive background

---

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Foldi, *Energy Secretary Granholm Violates Ethics Pledge To Boost Proterra, Watchdog Claims*, Washington Free Beacon (Nov 12, 2021), <https://freebeacon.com/biden-administration/energy-secretary-granholm-violates-ethics-pledge-to-boost-proterra-watchdog-claims/>.

<sup>9</sup> Warren Rojas, *Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm acknowledges late stock filings, and says she paid \$400 for violating federal conflict-of-interest law*, Business Insider (Feb. 3, 2022), <https://www.businessinsider.com/energy-secretary-jennifer-granholm-late-fees-stock-act-violation-2022-2>

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Foldi, *Controversial Energy Department Official Quietly Exits*, The Spectator (Jan. 13, 2023), <https://thespectator.com/topic/energy-department-kelly-speakes-backman-conflict-interest/>.

<sup>11</sup> Jeremy Dillon, *Republicans say DOE official may have violated ethics pledge*, E&E News (July 14, 2021), <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2021/07/14/republicans-say-doe-official-may-have-violated-ethics-pledge-179858>; Adam Shaw, *Watchdog group says Energy Department official may have violated ethics obligations*, Fox News (May 29, 2021), <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/watchdog-energy-deputy-may-have-violated-ethics-obligations>; Matthew Foldi, *Granholm Deputy Flagged Over Conflict of Interest Concern*, Washington Free Beacon (May 28, 2021), <https://freebeacon.com/biden-administration/granholm-deputy-flagged-over-conflict-of-interest-concern/>; Nicholas Sherman, *Watchdog files complaint over possible ethics violation by Acting Assistant Secretary of Energy*, Just the News (July 29, 2021), <https://justthenews.com/accountability/watchdogs/watchdog-files-complaint-over-possible-ethics-violation-acting-assistant>.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Catenacci, *Non-binary ex-Biden official Sam Brinton was on secret taxpayer-funded trip at time of luggage theft*, Fox News (July 17, 2023), <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/non-binary-ex-biden-official-sam-brinton-secret-taxpayer-funded-trip-time-luggage-theft>

checks that are normally required for the high-level position held by Brinton.<sup>13</sup> Noted legal scholar Jonathan Turley also observed:

“[T]here should be answers on whether there were any indicators missed in the background investigation. Brinton was in a sensitive position and could have been targeted for blackmail or coercive measures by foreign intelligence or criminal elements. It is not clear if Brinton was asked about criminal conduct or theft in the course of these pre-clearance interviews — or whether a polygraph examination was performed. Those seem legitimate questions for Secretary Granholm and the DOE to answer.”<sup>14</sup>

Adding to the dysfunction, Brinton’s luggage-stealing behavior allegedly began years prior to being picked as Secretary Granholm’s deputy in charge of America’s nuclear arsenal. Still unknown is what the Secretary knew about Brinton’s escapades while Brinton served in her agency. When ethics and integrity are dismissed at the top, subordinates are destined for failure.

For most Americans, a record of misconduct and managerial failure like Secretary Granholm’s would have been met with dismissal long ago. Sadly, documents from public records requests reveal further evidence of her potential abuse of power, contempt for the rules, and possible misconduct. For example, disdain for the perception of her actions by average Americans was on full display when she jetted to Glasgow, Scotland to attend the 2021 United Nations Climate Conference, spending \$12,319 on round trip flights, where she sat exclusively in business or first-class seats, on flights that emitted nearly a ton and half (3,412.5 lbs) of CO<sub>2</sub>.<sup>15</sup>

Another employee, who enjoyed maximum telework and was not obligated to make the trip to her office on a daily basis, apparently was somehow able to travel to Glasgow as part of the DOE entourage. The employee who apparently was not able to attend work in the office because of COVID concerns was able to attend an overseas conference with thousands of participants.<sup>16</sup>

Each of these incidents demonstrate a profound disregard for how the actions of Secretary Granholm and her subordinates reflect on our nation’s public servants in the

---

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Senator John Barrasso (R-WY), Barrasso Calls on DOE to Thoroughly Review Security Clearance Processes Following Theft by Senior Official (Nov. 30, 2022), <https://www.energy.senate.gov/2022/11/barrasso-calls-on-doe-to-thoroughly-review-security-clearance-processes-following-theft-by-senior-official>

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Turley, *Report: Biden Official Committed Grand Larceny While on Sensitive Government Trip*, Res ipsa loquitur – The thing itself speaks (July 17, 2023), <https://jonathanturley.org/2023/07/17/report-biden-official-committed-grand-larceny-while-on-sensitive-government-trip/>

<sup>15</sup> Jennifer Granholm’s Travel Authorization Notification and Voucher for COP26 Climate Conference, Documents extracted from HQ-2022-00164-F Second Partial Responsive Records\_Redacted (pp. 23-26, 46-50), <https://protectpublictrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Granholm-COP26-travel.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Approval and discussion for Jennifer Wilcox to attend COP26, Documents extracted from HQ-2022-00164-F Second Partial Responsive Records\_Redacted (pp. 261-265), <https://protectpublictrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Wilcox.pdf>.

eyes of the average American citizen. Taken together, these episodes cast serious doubt on the Secretary's fitness to hold a cabinet seat.

It is an undisputed fact that Jennifer Granholm is a sophisticated federal employee, a trained lawyer, and an experienced public servant. The American people have every right to demand a high ethical bar for anyone with such credentials charged to lead a large and important federal agency. You often speak of maintaining the highest standards for your administration's appointees. It is past time that you demonstrate that this promise holds some meaning.

In light of the repeated ethical lapses, as well as the apparent tolerance of a lax culture of ethical compliance at the Department of Energy, it is crucial for ensuring the trust of the American people that Secretary Granholm be immediately relieved of her duties.

Saulius "Saul" Anuzis  
President  
60 Plus Association

James L. Martin  
Founder/Chairman  
60 Plus Association

Bob Carlstrom  
President  
AMAC Action

Thomas Jones  
President  
American Accountability Foundation

Craig Rucker  
President  
CFACT

Dr. Steven J. Allen  
Vice Chairman  
The Conservative Caucus

E. Calvin Beisner  
President  
The Cornwall Alliance for the  
Stewardship of Creation

Kris Ullman  
President  
Eagle Forum

Craig Richardson  
President  
Energy & Environment Legal Institute  
(E&E Legal)

David Bozell  
President  
ForAmerica

Cameron Sholty  
Executive Director  
Heartland Impact

James Taylor  
President  
The Heartland Institute

L. Brent Bozell III  
Founder and President  
MRC

Donna Jackson  
Director of Membership Development  
Project 21 Black Leadership Network

Michael Chamberlain  
Director  
Protect the Public's Trust