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August 2, 2007

Inspector General Earl Devaney
U.S. Interior Department
1849 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Inspector General Devaney:

It has come to my attention, through news reports, that a Bush Administration political appointee named Matthew McKeown has recently been appointed to a civil service position at the Interior Department. Specifically, Mr. McKeown is Interior's new deputy associate solicitor and will remain in that post after the Bush Administration ends in January 2009.

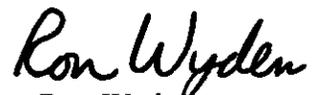
It isn't uncommon for political appointees to burrow into the bureaucracy as an administration comes to a close, but that does not mean that the practice is appropriate or that civil service procedures have not been compromised.

It's my understanding that Mr. McKeown was a political appointee in Interior's Office of the Solicitor. He then moved to the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division where he served as the principal deputy to Ms. Sue Ellen Wooldridge, the head of that division. He then succeeded her when she resigned in January. Now, Mr. McKeown is returning to the Solicitor's Office at the Interior Department, not as a political appointee, but as a permanent civil service employee.

I request that you review the facts of Mr. McKeown's hiring as deputy associate solicitor to determine if it was handled according to civil-service rules (i.e., the job vacancy was properly posted, multiple candidates were considered, he was hired based on measurable criteria, etc.); that you determine who made the selection decision and whether Mr. McKeown's appointment was proper, and whether Mr. McKeown's political associations played a role in his selection. I also request that you determine whether this is an isolated event or whether there is a pattern of hiring political appointees to fill civil service positions and whether there are adequate safeguards in the Department's hiring process to ensure that civil service positions are being filled properly.

If I can offer any additional information to help with this request, please call Dave Berick in my office at (202) 224-1106.

Sincerely,


Ron Wyden
United States Senator

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