

REI Chief Executive Nominated to Department of the Interior

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Peter Granitz/APRN

President Barack Obama nominated REI chief executive Sally Jewell to lead the Department of the Interior today. It's a Cabinet position with incredible influence over Alaska. And by virtually every account, the pick surprised everyone.

APRN's Peter Granitz has reactions to the unexpected nominee from Washington.

The Department of Interior oversees critical programs in Alaska … the Bureaus of Indian Affairs and Land Management, the National Park Service … and the offices that promote and regulate off-shore drilling.

In his announcement, Mr. Obama rattled off a long list of accomplishments outgoing Secretary Ken Salazar has achieved, including opening more land and water to energy production. And now the president turns to another westerner, Sally Jewell, to continue on that path. She comes from the private sector and the Seattle region.

<<I'm willing to bet she will be the first Secretary of the Interior who frequently hikes mailbox peak in her native Washington State, and who once spent a month climbing mountains in Antarctica, which is just not something I'd think of doing. It seems like it'd be cold, and I was born in Hawaii.>> (.23)………

…………Senator Begich also appreciates that Jewell has been in the private sector. Before REI, she worked in commercial banking, and out of college, in the oil fields of Oklahoma and Colorado for Mobil.

She's been active in elections, giving money to many candidates. She's mostly donated to Democrats, including a like two-hundred-fifty dollar contribution to Senator Begich in his 2008 Senate run. She also gave five hundred dollars to Senator Murkowski in 2009.

Absent

from her donor list is Congressman Don Young. He says he's disappointed in the pick because he does not think she has an understanding of public lands issues.

<<I do believe her interests lie in recreational purposes and not multiple use of the lands.>> (.04)

The oil and gas industry is keeping relatively quiet. John Felmy is the chief economist at the American Petroleum Institute. He says he welcomes a fresh start at Interior.

<<Well, we've had some differences with Secretary Salazar. We've had some onshore leases that have been pulled back. We're disappointed in that because we think we have an enormous amount of oil and gas that we can develop. We'd like to move forward as fast as possible.>> (.14)

Felmy would not say whether API would intervene in the confirmation process … with an ad campaign or publicly oppose the nomination.

Some environmental groups are excited about the pick. Cindy Shogan directs the Alaska Wilderness League. She says Jewell's hardest task will be fighting against strong support for Arctic drilling.

<<If she wants to make her mark, she's going to have to make sure she has the support of the delegation, or is willing to make decisions that will disappoint them.>> (.10)

There is no date set for the confirmation hearings. It could be as early as next week, though that's unlikely. After that, the Senate is on recess until the last week of February.

In Washington, D.C.
– ’m Peter Granitz

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