

## Written Testimony to the House Natural Resources

### Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

**Rep. Paul Gosar, chairman**

Hearing on “Examining the Influence of Extreme Environmental Activist Groups  
in the Department of the Interior”

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Chairman Gosar, Vice Chairman Collins, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the honor of testifying. I’m president of the Capital Research Center, where for decades we have studied nonprofits and extremist groups.

I applaud the full Natural Resources Committee and this subcommittee for your attention to threats posed by environmental extremists and special interest groups attempting to influence the Department of the Interior—matters that do not receive nearly as much attention as they deserve from Congress and the media.

As we meet, radical extremists are showing their contempt for the rule of law and for common decency on college campuses in this city and across the country, harassing Jewish students and defending terrorist attacks. Where left-wing radicals are concerned, a group may be best known for its stand on a non-environmental issue, but the same group is likely to espouse extreme environmental views, too. Take Code Pink, for example, a group best known for zealotry related to foreign policy, including a history of hatred of Israel: some years ago one of its national directors claimed “Israel is a terror state” and its existence is a “war crime.”<sup>1</sup> In just the last two

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/prominent-voices-demonize-israel-regarding-conflict>.

weeks Code Pink protestors defending Hamas shut down San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge to demand "Palestinian liberation" and disrupted the White House Correspondents Dinner.<sup>2</sup> When speaking of Palestine, Code Pink uses the language of indigenous people; for instance, "CODEPINK recognizes Palestinians as the rightful owners and caretakers of Palestine, their indigenous homeland."<sup>3</sup>

But like most extremist groups Code Pink also includes radical environmentalism in its campaigns to manipulate federal departments, including Interior. Code Pink joined others to harass Rep. Nancy Pelosi at her office, demanding she pass the so-called Green New Deal.<sup>4</sup> It has celebrated the blocking of pipelines near Indian lands,<sup>5</sup> and in many other ways has made clear it sees all these radical causes as inseparable.

Under the current Administration, another radical group, Pueblo Action Alliance (PAA), wages the best-known extremist campaign to influence the Interior Department. Like Code Pink, PAA seamlessly connects radical environmental views with radical foreign policy views and shows a fondness for revolutionary violence—all obvious just from the front page of PAA's website. That landing page currently shows a PAA flyer for the COP28 climate conference that includes radical environmentalism (denouncing carbon capture, hydrogen, water and nuclear power; demanding a complete phase-out of fossil fuels), radical feminism (calling for "feminist regenerative economies"), and radical anti-Israel policies ("solidarity with our Palestine relatives").<sup>6</sup> The page's very first words exhort: "The Pueblo Revolt Never Ended: 1680 to Infinity," a reference to the uprising of Pueblo people against Spanish colonizers in A.D. 1680, which brought the death of hundreds of Spaniards.<sup>7</sup> I do not defend the Spanish who mistreated Pueblo people in past centuries, but to act as if present-day Pueblo people are enduring similar horrors and to also suggest that murderous uprisings should continue unto "Infinity" bespeaks a dangerous

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/sanfrancisco/news/second-protest-blocks-all-lanes-of-golden-gate-bridge-san-francisco/>; <https://thehill.com/homenews/media/4626563-demonstrators-protest-media-coverage-of-israel-hamas-war-at-white-house-correspondents-dinner/>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.codepink.org/palestine>.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.codepink.org/green\\_new\\_deal\\_yes\\_war\\_weapons\\_planet\\_destruction\\_no](https://www.codepink.org/green_new_deal_yes_war_weapons_planet_destruction_no).

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.codepink.org/growing\\_a\\_local\\_peace\\_economy\\_daily\\_198](https://www.codepink.org/growing_a_local_peace_economy_daily_198).

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.puebloactionalliance.org/>.

<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pueblo\\_Revolt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pueblo_Revolt), citing *The Pueblo Revolt of 1680: Conquest and Resistance in Seventeenth-Century New Mexico*, Andrew L. Knaut. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. 1995.

radicalism that Americans across the political spectrum do not want influencing any part of the federal government.

Radicalism's affinity for violence is also seen in the way PAA media organizer Somah Haaland posted to Instagram photos of protests that turned violent at the Interior Department. Haaland wrote, "What an honor it was to march with my Pueblo kin last week for #Peoplesfossilfuels week of action." The reference was to October 2021 protests that, as one media report put it, "culminated in outbreaks of violence and arrests at the Department of the Interior that were 'reminiscent of January 6th.'" Dozens of radicals were arrested, and "at least one officer was hospitalized."<sup>8</sup>

PAA's vision is written in the kind of "woke" vocabulary found in Columbia classrooms whose poorly educated students now terrorize their Jewish peers on campus. PAA feverishly promises "to dismantle and eradicate white supremacy, capitalism, imperialism, hetero-patriarchy and extractive colonialism. Rematriation of everything stolen."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, PAA issued a joint statement on the death of George Floyd with the All African People's Revolutionary Party – New Mexico that declared,

The institution of policing in the United States was created to control, criminalize, and brutalize African and Indigenous peoples on stolen land. Modern Amerikkkan police descend directly from slave patrols and settler militias formed in the 18th and 19th centuries. In the present day, their ranks are riddled with outright fascists and white supremacists. Police and armed US state agents like those of ICE, the DEA, the FBI, DHS, and the US military are working today as they've always been designed to – as tools of racist settler-colonial capitalist and imperialist violence, hand in hand with white vigilante terrorists.<sup>10</sup>

It is easy to see how anyone indoctrinated with this hysterical ideology could turn violent, and in that vein, PAA's allies in the All African People's Revolutionary Party proudly seek "the total

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11713413/Interior-secretarys-daughter-Deb-Haaland-high-ranking-member-radical-environmentalist-group.html>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.puebloactionalliance.org/purpose>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.puebloactionalliance.org/blog/justice-for-george-floyd>.

liberation and unification of Africa under Scientific Socialism.”<sup>11</sup> The Party pays homage to its founder, Kwame Nkrumah, the dictator of Ghana who received the Lenin Peace Prize from the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup>

The PAA is also aligned with another Communist dictatorship through its alliance with Cuba’s Venceremos Brigades. Its website includes an essay by PAA’s “creative strategist” that glamorizes Cuban tyranny. The strategist explains that when he returned to this country from Cuba, he “experienced reverse culture shock returning to an environment with such a prominent white supremacist ideology.”<sup>13</sup> By contrast, Freedom House rates Cuba as “Not Free” and reports, “Cuba’s one-party communist state outlaws political pluralism, bans independent media, suppresses dissent, and severely restricts basic civil liberties.”<sup>14</sup>

Most Americans would likely assume that a group as radical as Pueblo Action Alliance would not be taken seriously by the Department of the Interior, but alas, the respect shown by the Department for these extremists has become notorious. This Committee has pointed out, in letters to the Secretary, that she and her department not only treat PAA as a source of policy wisdom but have also created at least the appearance of bias in official decisions and improper assistance to PAA.<sup>15</sup>

The letters document multiple meetings between the Secretary and PAA officials. The Secretary has promoted PAA by having its insignia appear in public photographs beginning from her first day in office. PAA has promoted itself by such means as posting these photographs on its Instagram account.<sup>16</sup> Activists have promoted Secretary Haaland’s involvement<sup>17</sup> in a film produced by the Director of PAA which demands that oil, gas, and mineral leasing outside of the Chaco Culture National Historical Park be ended—a question on which the Secretary officially ruled in favor of PAA’s demand. And finally there are the many ways that the Secretary appears

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<sup>11</sup> <https://aaprp-intl.org/about-aaprp/>.

<sup>12</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lenin\\_Peace\\_Prize](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lenin_Peace_Prize).

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.puebloactionalliance.org/blog/solidarity-with-cuba>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/cuba>.

<sup>15</sup> [https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/haaland\\_impartiality\\_and\\_misuse\\_of\\_office.pdf](https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/haaland_impartiality_and_misuse_of_office.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/CJwfQ9Wlkvg>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.videoproject.org/our-story.html>.

to be influenced by her adult child, Somah Haaland, who is employed by PAA. No wonder the Committee is deeply concerned that PAA may have improperly received nonpublic information from the Department.

Let there be no claims that such policy decisions as the withdrawal of leasing outside Chaco Park indicates respect for indigenous peoples. In this case as in others, a ruling sought by one tribe is strenuously opposed by another tribe. The Navajo Nation voted to reject the Secretary's policy for the understandable reason that it expects her decision to cost the tribe hundreds of millions of dollars.<sup>18</sup> The Navajos offered a compromise on this policy but were ignored by the Department, which failed to consult with a tribe that was powerfully affected by the policy. The result? According to the Standing Committee of the 25th Navajo Nation Council, their tribe members "will be pushed into greater poverty."<sup>19</sup>

In response to this injustice, Kathleen Sgamma, head of a trade group for small independent producers, objected that Somah Haaland has "aggressively lobbied DOI and Congress to advance the Chaco withdrawal." Sgamma added, "Can you imagine if President Trump's Interior Secretary David Bernhardt had a son who lobbied him on behalf of Western Energy Alliance to increase leasing around Chaco? It would have been unacceptable and rightfully criticized. Secretary Haaland's situation is no different and probably worse since over 5,000 Navajos stand to lose millions of dollars in income every year if the withdrawal is approved."<sup>20</sup>

### **"Dark Money" Used to Influence the Department**

With that reference to former Interior Secretary Bernhardt we come to another aspect of environmental extremism's influence on the Department. Mr. Bernhardt became Secretary after environmental activists had first hounded his predecessor Ryan Zinke from the office. The same activists then hounded Bernhardt through the end of the previous Administration. Those activists are part of the largest network of "dark money" on either side of the political spectrum; namely,

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<sup>18</sup> [https://www.thecentersquare.com/new\\_mexico/article\\_5bb6556e-e9f6-11ed-a681-1f3ccee2b6f0.html](https://www.thecentersquare.com/new_mexico/article_5bb6556e-e9f6-11ed-a681-1f3ccee2b6f0.html).

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in *ibid*.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/may/4/interior-secretary-deb-haaland-dogged-ethics-quest/>.

the network operated by Arabella Advisors, and they have taken precious little interest in this Administration's dubious conflicts of interest and other ethics challenges.

The Arabella network's scheme is to create and manage multiple "umbrella" nonprofits which in turn pop up hundreds of fake grassroots groups for all sorts of political purposes. In this case, two of Arabella's nonprofits created a matching pair of fake groups known as Western Values Project and Western Values Project Action in 2013.<sup>21</sup> Those groups in turn spent years attacking first Zinke, then Bernhardt, in hopes of influencing Interior policy and paving the way for their radical allies such as Secretary Haaland.<sup>22</sup>

Although the fake groups' websites tried to imply they were launched in Helena, Montana, and operated by "folks who live in the Rocky Mountain West,"<sup>23</sup> in fact the groups were operated out of two of Arabella's "Beltway bandit" shops, the New Venture Fund and the 1630 Fund in Washington, D.C. They were staffed by Democratic and union operatives, such as Chris Saeger, a former staffer of the Montana Democratic Party and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and two more Montana Democratic staffers, Jayson O'Neill and Yetta Stein. The advisory board included a Colorado Democratic staffer, Kjersten Forseth, who was also a former AFL-CIO political director. Another advisory board member was Caroline Ciccone, who in 2019 ran another New Venture Fund fake group, Restore Public Trust, which attacked the Trump Administration. Ciccone, a former communications director of the Democratic National Committee, previously led Americans United for Change, a left-wing agitation group whose national field director, Scott Foval, was recorded in 2016 by undercover journalists bragging that the group had paid mentally ill and homeless people to instigate violence at Trump campaign rallies. Within days, Foval was fired.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/western-values-project/> and <https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/western-values-project-action/>.

<sup>22</sup> See Hayden Ludwig, "Arabella's Long War," Capital Research Center, November 12, 2021, <https://capitalresearch.org/article/arabellas-long-war-part-1/>.

<sup>23</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20191004111231/https://westernvaluesproject.org/about-us/>.

<sup>24</sup> Scott Walter, *Arabella: The Dark Money Network of Leftist Billionaires Secretly Transforming America* (New York: Encounter Books, 2024), p. 97-98.

Another advisory board member was Kyle Herrig, who had been on the board of Arabella's New Venture Fund as well as the advisory board of at least five other Arabella fake groups, including Ciccone's Restore Public Trust. Herrig came to Arabella from one of its largest and most sinister donors, the foreign national billionaire Hansjörg Wyss.<sup>25</sup> Because he lacks U.S. citizenship or even a green card, Mr. Wyss is supposed to stay out of U.S. politics, but in years past he contributed over \$100,000 in illegal direct political contributions to such Members of Congress as Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL), former Rep. Jay Inslee (D-WA), and former Rep. Mark Udall (D-CO). Unfortunately, the illicit donations were not discovered until after the statute of limitations on the crime had expired, though the contributions are still visible in the Federal Election Commission's database.<sup>26</sup>

In more recent years, Wyss has contributed roughly half a billion dollars to nonprofits active in politics and public policy, as documented by the watchdog group Americans for Public Trust.<sup>27</sup> A quarter-billion of those dollars went over the last two decades into the Arabella network, which launched the Western Values Project nonprofits and other attack groups aimed at the previous Administration. Wyss's deeply disturbing interventions in American politics through his multibillion-dollar Wyss Foundation and its connected "dark money" 501(c)(4) Berger Action Fund were the subject of an oversight hearing in the House Ways and Means Committee, exercising its supervision of the nonprofit sector, at which I was honored to testify last December.<sup>28</sup>

In 2020, the two Western Values Project nonprofits linked to Herrig, plus Restore Public Trust linked to Ciccone and two more Arabella fake groups (American Oversight, a judicial activist and litigation group, and Allied Progress, which attacked Republican cabinet officials)

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<sup>25</sup> Though Herrig's LinkedIn and Accountable.US bios hide his Wyss connection, he is listed as an employee of the Wyss Foundation in its 2012 and 2013 IRS Form 990s:

[https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/display\\_990/251823874/2013\\_10\\_PF%2F25-1823874\\_990PF\\_201212;](https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/display_990/251823874/2013_10_PF%2F25-1823874_990PF_201212;)  
[https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/display\\_990/251823874/2014\\_10\\_PF%2F25-1823874\\_990PF\\_201312.](https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/display_990/251823874/2014_10_PF%2F25-1823874_990PF_201312)

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.fec.gov/data/receipts/individual-contributions/?contributor\\_name=Wyss%2C+Hansjoerg&contributor\\_name=Wyss%2C+Hansjorg.](https://www.fec.gov/data/receipts/individual-contributions/?contributor_name=Wyss%2C+Hansjoerg&contributor_name=Wyss%2C+Hansjorg)

<sup>27</sup> Americans for Public Trust, "Foreign Influence in U.S. Elections: How Swiss Billionaire Hansjörg Wyss and the Arabella Advisors Network Uses Foreign Dark Money to Sway American Politics and Policy," July 2023, [https://americansforpublictrust.org/document/report-foreign-influence-in-u-s-elections/.](https://americansforpublictrust.org/document/report-foreign-influence-in-u-s-elections/)

<sup>28</sup> [https://waysandmeans.house.gov/event/oversight-subcommittee-hearing-on-growth-of-the-tax-exempt-sector-and-the-impact-on-the-american-political-landscape/.](https://waysandmeans.house.gov/event/oversight-subcommittee-hearing-on-growth-of-the-tax-exempt-sector-and-the-impact-on-the-american-political-landscape/)

announced they were being rolled into one new organization: Accountable.US, *itself* a former Arabella fake group later established as an independent nonprofit headed by Herrig and Ciccone. I note that Accountable.US also engages in such work as releasing an oppo research dump on me and other witnesses ahead of our testimony at a recent House Administration Committee hearing.<sup>29</sup> Apparently Arabella's children do not appreciate having the curtain pulled back on this massive Wizard of Oz-style operation that takes in billions of dollars every election cycle.<sup>30</sup>

Before leaving the enormous influence exerted by the Arabella network on the Interior Department across entire Administrations, and the network's deep-rooted connections to Hansjörg Wyss, I should add that Arabella's founder, Eric Kessler, was radicalized by an environmental extremist, and that Mr. Wyss's private foundation and his "dark money" group are run by a woman, Molly McUsic, who likely first met Mr. Kessler before he launched Arabella, when both of them were working at the Department of the Interior under Bruce Babbitt, the former head of the League of Conservation Voters (LCV), where Kessler previously worked.

The founder of the League of Conservation Voters, David Brower, says he established it "initially as part of Friends of the Earth," which he also founded, but the two groups "later separated for legal reasons (corporations are not supposed to contribute to political candidates)."<sup>31</sup> Brower earlier ran the Sierra Club, but he so radicalized and politicized the group that it lost its 501(c)(3) charitable status.<sup>32</sup> Brower also radicalized the undergraduate Kessler in 1990, when Brower gave a speech at Kessler's Colorado university. Kessler hitchhiked after Brower to San Francisco to work with him.

It's unclear whether Kessler realized just how radical Brower was. In a 1977 Friends of the Earth manifesto overseen by Brower, the environmental apocalypse predicted was not then global warming but the "population bomb." (Note that the religious fanaticism of radicals seems to

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<sup>29</sup> <https://cha.house.gov/hearings?ID=CF598468-0C48-4DAC-9C0E-0287E733682A>. My testimony is available at <https://capitalresearch.org/article/scott-walter-testifies-to-committee-on-house-administration/>.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.influencewatch.org/for-profit/arabella-advisors/#network-financial-overview>.

<sup>31</sup> David R. Brower, "Foreword" to Friends of the Earth, *Progress As If Survival Mattered* (San Francisco: Friends of the Earth, 1977), p. 8.

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[https://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/magazine/entry/from\\_heresy\\_to\\_conventional\\_wisdom\\_at\\_blinding\\_speed/##](https://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/magazine/entry/from_heresy_to_conventional_wisdom_at_blinding_speed/##).



require the preaching of a secular apocalypse, though as the various predictions of doom fail to come true, new apocalypses must be manufactured.)

That 1977 manifesto's first chapter deals with the alleged threat of population, and it calmly ponders horrific public policies to "save" the world from people:

Perhaps someday childbearing will be deemed a punishable crime against society unless the parents hold a government license. Or perhaps all potential parents will be required to use contraceptive chemicals, the governments issuing antidotes to citizens chosen for childbearing.<sup>33</sup>

I do not know if Arabella's Kessler was aware of this depraved view of alleged environmental dangers, nor if Secretary Haaland, as she earned a lifetime score of 98 percent from the League of Conservation voters for her service in Congress,<sup>34</sup> was aware of the extremism that gave birth to the League. But I do know it should be a warning to anyone with oversight over the Department she now runs, and to the Secretary herself: Radical environmentalism can blind its acolytes to reality and lead to gruesomely anti-human conclusions, rendering such radicalism entirely unfit as a basis for public policy.

Even on the more mundane level of "dark money" influencing the Interior Department, note that the Center for Public Integrity has warned that the League of Conservation Voters has become a "dark money" heavyweight,<sup>35</sup> using its cash to influence the Administration and thwart the desires for abundant minerals and inexpensive energy felt by most Americans.

Another example of the combination of "dark money" and environmental extremism comes from the Wilderness Society, which regularly works to influence the Interior Department. The Society's sister group, the Wilderness Society's Action Fund, reveals its crude partisanship by

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<sup>33</sup> *Progress As If Survival Mattered*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>34</sup> Walter, *Arabella*, p. 103.

<sup>35</sup> <https://publicintegrity.org/federal-politics/league-of-conservation-voters-becoming-dark-money-heavyweight/>.

donating only to Democratic candidates.<sup>36</sup> The Society itself has not one but two Wyss-world leaders on its governing council: the aforementioned Molly McUSIC, leader of the Wyss Foundation and its Berger Action Fund “dark money” group, and Hansjörg Wyss himself.<sup>37</sup> McUSIC serves as a vice-chair of the Society’s governing council. Evidence of the Society’s influence in the Interior Department appears in such instances as the December 2, 2022 meeting with Deputy Secretary Beaudreau to discuss Izembek National Wildlife Refuge policy,<sup>38</sup> which three months later led to a complete victory for the Society.<sup>39</sup>

Clearly, radical environmentalists with extreme views are exercising considerable sway over the Department of the Interior. I hope this serious problem will be addressed. Americans, especially the poor, deserve to enjoy the benefits of inexpensive energy and abundant resources, with which our nation has been blessed. You should protect the country from radicals who attempt to push on the levers of government to eliminate energy sources and to prevent the mining of the very natural resources required to produce their preferred sources of energy and transportation.

Thank you.

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.opensecrets.org/political-action-committees-pacs/wilderness-society-action-fund/C00788992/pac-to-pac/2022>.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.wilderness.org/about-us/our-team/our-governing-council>.

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/beaudreau-calendar-dec-2022-redacted.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.wilderness.org/articles/press-release/biden-administration-rescinds-land-exchange-protects-izembek>.