

INTERIOR

Bernhardt appoints permanent chief of staff

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Interior Secretary David Bernhardt today formally promoted Todd Willens, his acting chief of staff, to the senior post on a permanent basis.

Willens, a former lobbyist who has a long history at Interior under the George W. Bush and Trump administrations, has served as acting chief of staff since January.

"I am appreciative to have Todd Willens as my permanent Chief of Staff," said Bernhardt in a statement. "His leadership in the front office will be a true asset in achieving the President's priorities for the Department."

Willens in a statement thanked "President Trump and Secretary Bernhardt in giving me this opportunity to serve our great country as Chief of Staff at the Department of the Interior."



Todd Willens. Willens/LinkedIn

Willens' appointment as chief of staff chips away at the number of senior Interior staffers serving in key roles on an acting basis.

Bernhardt last week signed an [order](#) extending the temporary assignments of senior leaders such as Kate MacGregor as acting deputy Interior secretary. That order also named Casey Hammond, Interior's principal deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals management, as acting director of the Bureau of Land Management ([Greenwire](#), May 16).

Willens joined Interior in July 2017 as an assistant deputy secretary, and he worked closely with Bernhardt during his time as deputy secretary and the transition to his confirmation as Interior secretary last month.

Prior to joining the Trump administration, Willens spent seven years as chief of staff for former New Mexico Rep. Steve Pearce (R), who left Congress last year for an unsuccessful run for governor. Pearce was a vocal critic of Obama-era land use policies that he and other Western GOP leaders complained hampered economic activity.

Before joining Pearce's staff, Willens worked as a lobbyist for several lobbying firms. But he also has extensive experience at Interior, serving as deputy assistant secretary for fish, wildlife and parks from 2006 to 2008, according to a brief biography provided by the agency.

Willens, a California native and 1994 graduate of UCLA, also served as legislative director for former California Rep. Richard Pombo (R), who would later appoint him senior policy director of the House Natural Resources Committee. During that time, Pombo, a vocal critic of the Endangered Species Act, was leading efforts by the committee to revise the bedrock environmental law ([Greenwire](#), July 12, 2017).

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