

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 3, 2020

The Honorable David L. Bernhardt  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street N.W.  
Washington D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

We write to urge the U.S. Department of Interior to immediately stop pursuing any policy proposals or actions unrelated to the COVID-19 emergency that require a public comment period until the threats of COVID-19 have subsided.

As the country is addressing the public health emergency of COVID-19, the agencies within the Department of Interior should be focused on how to bolster the response to COVID-19 in communities across America, not push through policy with limited public input. Americans should not be required to find and comment on the Department's rule making, while they are experiencing major disruptions with childcare, employment, and safety. The Department is also obligated to undertake tribal consultation for many of its decisions, a process which cannot effectively take place when Tribal governments are responding to the public health emergency. Under these circumstances, any policies put forward by the Department would not have the appropriate level of public input and the validity of such policy would be brought into question.

The Department is currently considering over 70 policies that have a significant impact on public lands, wildlife protections, and oil and gas leases. In light of this global pandemic, the Interior Department has taken important steps to address the issue, including pausing all Resource Advisory Council meetings. However, we urge the Department to take the next logical step, which is to suspend any of these policy decisions and focus on addressing the response efforts to COVID-19.

Sincerely,



RON WYDEN  
United States Senator



JEFFREY A. MERKLEY  
United States Senator



TOM UDALL  
United States Senator