

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 22, 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 Department of Interior (DOI) to immediately issue guidance on mask and PPE policies consistent with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for all agency employees. Further, DOI agency employees should be directed to follow state guidelines and cooperate with county-level and state-level Coronavirus investigations and contact tracing.

As the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths rise to all-time highs in the United States, it is imperative that the federal government do all that it can to protect the health and safety of all Americans, including federal employees working in the field, fighting wildfire, and working in government offices. The official CDC recommendation is that individuals wear a cloth face covering in public settings and when in contact with people not living in their household. Our states have taken important steps in the wake of an alarming increase in COVID-19 cases. For example, on July 13, Oregon required that indoor gatherings be limited to 10, and that face coverings are required in outdoor locations where six feet of distance cannot be maintained. These policies apply to all people, including those working for federal agencies. The simple act of wearing a mask not only reduces the spread of the virus and keeps people safe but is critical for small businesses across the country to remain open and for our economy to fully recover.

It is also important to remember that COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted Black, Hispanic and Indigenous communities. On your July 9 visit with the Klamath Tribes of Oregon, the Tribe expressed concerns that you and a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from the state of California refused to wear a mask during the meeting. This is particularly concerning given that Tribes in Oregon and across the country have seen an increase in positive COVID-19 cases, and larger outbreaks are being confirmed in counties with a smaller relative population throughout Eastern Oregon where this meeting took place. There are also on-the-ground reports of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) employees ignoring Oregon's mask mandates, and we are concerned this blatant disregard for the public health is happening across the agency in other states. This type of cavalier and callous indifference for human safety is unacceptable, especially from those in positions of leadership.

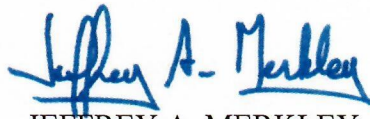
Any effort to address this pandemic must be driven by facts, in coordination with our public health officials, and be absent of any political motivations. Department wide guidance on face

coverings and requiring employees across the Department of Interior to follow both CDC and state guidelines will provide a clear and consistent message that will keep the country safe. We ask that you respond to this letter by July 29, 2020 with detailed steps that you are taking to address these concerns and what guidelines will be put in place for your employees.

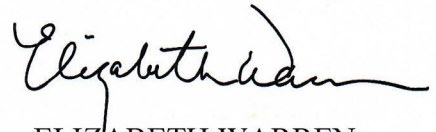
Sincerely,



RON WYDEN
United States Senator



JEFFREY A. MERKLEY
United States Senator



ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senator