

The Honorable Cory Gardner
354 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

February 20, 2019

Dear Senator Gardner:

Thank you for your consideration of the comments expressed below on behalf of 20 organizations across Colorado. The conservation of our public lands, water, wildlife habitat and outdoor spaces are common to the missions of our organizations. We write to express our grave concerns with the nomination of David Bernhardt as Secretary of the Interior. In his time at Interior, Mr. Bernhardt has demonstrated a contempt for conservation and has carried out the most anti-conservation policies in a generation all while exercising questionable ethical and moral judgment. While he is a Coloradan, his track record and many conflicts of interest demonstrate that he is so vastly out of touch with Coloradans' support for protecting our public lands that we urge you to vote no on his nomination.

The policies that Mr. Bernhardt has pursued are antithetical to how Coloradans value our public lands. Mr. Bernhardt's pursuit of energy dominance as the sole use of our public lands has resulted in numerous oil and gas lease sales across Colorado that have caused significant controversy, many of which have been [deferred](#) at the 11th hour due to public outcry. That outcry has occurred even as Mr. Bernhardt has [cut the opportunities for public comment](#), limiting the ability of Coloradans to provide input to the department before their public lands are leased for drilling. In addition, Mr. Bernhardt has led the [rollback](#) of the Bureau of Land Management's methane waste prevention rule, which was modeled on Colorado's successful state rule, at a time when the case for urgent action on global warming is even [being made by the Trump Administration](#). Further, Mr. Bernhardt has [orchestrated](#) the opening of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's coastal plan to oil drilling, putting at risk hundreds of bird species including the Bohemian Waxwing which migrates from Colorado to the refuge in the summer. Lastly, Mr. Bernhardt was involved in former Secretary Zinke's "review" of national monuments that led to [gutting protections](#) for about 2 million acres at Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments, opening those areas for mining and drilling.

Beyond his policies, a review Mr. Bernhardt's record clearly shows that he is fundamentally unfit to serve as Secretary of the Interior. Although his many conflicts of interest and actions detrimental to conservation policies are too long to detail in this letter, here are a few noteworthy items.

- Mr. Bernhardt is a former [oil and gas lobbyist](#) with dozens of former clients that currently have business before the Department of Interior. We have already seen policies pushed by his former clients adopted by the Department of Interior.

- As a lobbyist Mr. Bernhardt advocated for policies that are harmful to our environment including lobbying for a bill seeking to delay new air pollution limits on [coal-fired power plants and lobbying for bills that would expand offshore oil and gas drilling](#) in the aftermath of the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster.
- As Deputy Secretary of the Interior, Bernhardt was a chief architect of a litany of the department's most destructive policies that harmed public health, public lands and waters, wildlife and future generations including the department opening the door for uranium mining near drinking water sources, the [largest elimination of protections for lands](#) once a part of our national monuments and the [opening of coastal waters](#) for drilling operations.
- When Acting Secretary Bernhardt was the second in command at the Department of Interior, it become embroiled in unprecedented levels of scandal. The department found itself and former Secretary Zinke the subject of [15+ federal investigations](#), including one that was referred to the Justice Department for a [potential criminal probe](#).

Additionally, the people of Colorado are opposed to this sort of behavior. A poll conducted by Center for Western Priorities shows [77% of Coloradans](#) are concerned that clients Mr. Bernhardt previously lobbied for have business before the department he currently runs. Colorado College's Conservation in the West poll found that Coloradans support protecting clean water, air quality and wildlife habitat for outdoor recreation on our public lands over producing more energy by roughly a [2-to-1 margin](#). Bernhardt's questionable judgement is not only unethical but puts at risk our outdoor recreation economy that generates [\\$887 billion annually nation-wide](#), and generated [\\$62 billion](#) to the Colorado economy and supported a half-million jobs in 2017.

Mr. Bernhardt's conflicts of interest, questionable judgement and industry ties make him unfit to serve in this position. His confirmation would place our public lands, waterways and wildlife at risk. We urge you to oppose his nomination.

Sincerely,

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Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition

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Executive Director (Interim)
Citizens for a Healthy Community

Jim Alexee
Director
Colorado Sierra Club

Scott Braden
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