

April 9, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary
Department of Interior
149 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

We, the undersigned groups, on behalf of our millions of members, urge you to reject calls by lawmakers for measures to relieve the oil and gas industry of essential obligations to American taxpayers that would do little to preserve jobs. These calls risk putting corporate profits above the emergency response required to mitigate the crisis that is the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department of the Interior should not heed them; the government's paramount focus should be the health and safety of communities and workers across the nation.

In a time of crisis, royalty relief for producers of federal fluid minerals would do nothing to aid communities, but rather could come at their expense. This type of bailout could deprive federal and state budgets, already in crisis, of funds they now more than ever cannot spare. These funds will only become more critical in the following months to help prevent and respond to the spread of novel coronavirus, keep our friends, family, and essential frontline workers from dying, and provide economic relief to those who have lost or could lose their jobs and businesses.

There is no doubt that *all* American workers are in need of relief right now. For those in the oil and gas industry, that relief should not come from the revenue owed to the Treasury. In any event, measures aimed at increasing production levels are the opposite of what is needed now, given that the industry's economic problems largely stem from a supply glut driven by foreign producers. Encouraging heightened, or even constant, production levels by waiving royalty payments and critical safety and transparency measures would only make the problem worse and put public health at risk.

Royalty relief would do little to preserve jobs or drilling businesses today, and we are concerned that the policy could persist indefinitely. The same is true of lease term extensions and other waivers, which would unfairly advantage industry for years beyond the likely term of this crisis and further endanger public health and safety under a system that already externalizes the costs of oil and gas production and reclamation on American taxpayers and landowners. Nor should your department be holding lease sales, limiting public comment periods, or granting coal producers royalty relief.

In the time of a pandemic, the American people deserve a cogent federal response that is systematically dedicated toward improving the resiliency and health of our communities, lands, and waters. Providing handouts to the oil and gas industry would directly conflict with such goals. We urge the Department of the Interior to direct its limited resources toward solutions that truly tackle the issues presented by the pandemic crisis.

Signed,

Alaska Wilderness League

Amazon Watch

Arkansas Valley Audubon Society

Blancett Ranches

Californians for Western Wilderness

Center for Civic Policy

Clean Water Action

Climate Law & Policy Project

Coalition to Protect America's National Parks

Conejos Clean Water

Conserve Southwest Utah

Denver Audubon

Earthjustice

Endangered Species Coalition

Evergreen Audubon

FracTracker Alliance

Global Witness

Great Old Broads for Wilderness

Green America

GreenFaith

Healthy Gulf (formerly Gulf Restoration Network)

Idaho Conservation League

Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance

Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

Arkansas Valley Audubon

Black Canyon Audubon Society

Boulder County Audubon Society

Center for Biological Diversity

Cheyenne High Plains Audubon Society

Climate Hawks Vote

Climate Smart Missoula

Comité Nacional de Lucha Contra el Cambio Climático, CNLCC

Conservation Lands Foundation

Dakota Resource Council

Earth Ethics, Inc.

Earthworks

Environment America

Fort Collins Audubon Society

Friends of the Earth US

Grand Canyon Trust

Great Salt Lake Audubon

Green Latinos

Greenpeace USA

ICCR (Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility)

Idaho Organization of Resource Councils

League of Conservation Voters

Midori Law Group, P.C.

Montana Environmental Information Center

National Parks Conservation Association

New Mexico Horse Council

New Mexico Sportsmen

NM Interfaith Power and Light

Nuestra Tierra Conservation Project

Oil Change International

Physicians for Social Responsibility

Protect Our Winters

Publish What You Pay-US

Red Desert Audubon Society

Rocky Mountain Wild

Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance

Surfrider Foundation

The Mountain Pact

Transition US

Weminuche Audubon Society

Western Environmental Law Center

Western Values Project

Wilderness Workshop

350 Colorado

350Brooklyn

Montana Conservation Voters

National Audubon Society

Natural Resources Defense Council

New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light

New York Communities for Change (NYCC)

Northern Plains Resource Council

Oceana

Partnership for Responsible Business

Project On Government Oversight

Public Citizen

Rainforest Action Network

Rio Grande Indivisible

Sierra Club

Sunrise Movement El Paso

The Climate Reality Project

The Wilderness Society

Waterkeeper Alliance, Inc.

Western Colorado Alliance

Western Organization of Resource Councils

WildEarth Guardians

350 Butte County

350 Colorado

350PDX