

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 3, 2019

Ms. Mary L. Kendall
Deputy Inspector General
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Ms. Kendall:

On September 28, 2018, we wrote to request that you monitor and investigate “instances of potential alterations to scientific reports, documents, or communications produced by the Department of the Interior (DOI) as well as instances of political pressure influencing science at DOI.” This letter was in reference to DOI’s alleged alterations of a National Park Service report on sea level rise. Unfortunately concerns remain regarding political interference over at DOI and thus today, we write again regarding DOI’s treatment of science and scientific experts and request an investigation specifically into the suppression of a Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinion that was due to be completed and released in December 2017.

On March 26, 2019, the New York Times published an article titled, “Interior Nominee Intervened to Block Report on Endangered Species.” The article details a series of documents obtained via a Freedom of Information Act request highlighting how Fish and Wildlife Service scientists had completed a comprehensive analysis showing that several widely-used pesticides were so toxic that they “jeopardize the continued existence” of more than 1,200 endangered birds, fish, and other animals. The documents went on to show that top political appointees, led by DOI’s then-Deputy Secretary and now Secretary-nominee David Bernhardt, blocked the release of the opinion and “set in motion a new process intended to apply a much narrower standard to determine the risks from pesticides.”

Under the current administration DOI has repeatedly shown a willingness to completely disregard the work of career scientists and allow political appointees who are not subject matter experts to influence the decision-making process. In our previous letter, we said we had no reason to believe that the attacks on science and pressure by political appointees to alter science in order to advance the administration’s narrative would cease, and this report reinforces that conclusion. As such we request an investigation into the delayed release of the Fish and Wildlife Biological Opinion that was due for release over a year ago.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,



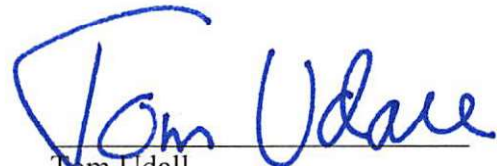
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Tom Udall
United States Senator



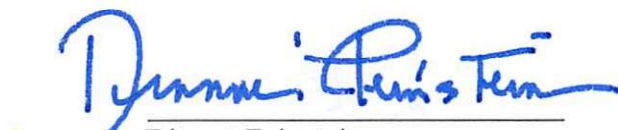
Jeffrey A. Merkley
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Cory A. Booker
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Benjamin L. Cardin
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Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator