



February 10, 2021.

The Honorable Jon Tester
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Tester,

RE: SECRETARY OF INTERIOR NOMINEE, REPRESENTATIVE DEB HAALAND (D-NM).

We write to offer our unequivocal support for Secretary of the Interior nominee, Representative Deb Haaland (D-NM). We urge you to not only support her during the confirmation process, but respectfully request that you also urge your colleagues in the US Senate to do the same, particularly those serving on the Committee on Indian Affairs.

Together, the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council, the Global Indigenous Council, and the Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Association represents every tribe in Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, North Dakota, Nebraska, and tribal nations in states as geographically disparate as Louisiana, Arizona, and Alaska. In short, a large swath of Indian Country and the citizenry arguably most invested in and impacted by the policies adopted by the Department of Interior.

It really should not be necessary for us to explain why Rep. Haaland is the most-fitting nominee for Secretary of the Interior in our nation's history, but in this divisive political atmosphere we feel that we must attempt to briefly summarize why. Rep. Haaland has not been nominated to President Biden's cabinet on the basis of wealth, social status, or to repay a favor, quite the contrary, Deb Haaland's life and career has exemplified selflessness and acting in service to others.

Recently described in *USA Today* as "hardscrabble," her personal story is one that, as Indigenous people, we can well relate to, and it clearly served to provide the foundation for her political career and the integrity that she is known for throughout Indian Country.

Few will be aware of this, but one of the first things Rep. Haaland did after being elected to the US Congress – even before taking office – was to publicly support our national billboard campaign to raise awareness for the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) tragedy. Throughout her

tenure in Congress, Rep. Haaland has welcomed our input on MMIWG legislation and fully comprehends this ongoing and existential threat to our Indigenous cultures and communities.

Unlike many in high political office, Rep. Haaland has never tried to disassociate extractive industry from the clear evidentiary pattern that identifies it with MMIWG cases. With the Bakken as just one example, extractive industry man camps at oil and shale fields, and along pipeline and construction routes, provide what has been accurately called “the nitroglycerin” to the MMIWG crisis. There is good reason for tribal nations and their tribal members opposing projects such as the Keystone-XL Pipeline; not only would that have created immense vulnerability to reservation communities along its proposed route, it, like similar initiatives from a bygone age, threatened environmental catastrophe.

Rep. Haaland has consistently demonstrated intellectual honesty when it comes to her decision making relative to controversial projects. The Keystone-XL Pipeline is an appropriate example. Though it is frankly absurd for the purpose of political expediency to try and separate the Tar Sands from the Keystone-XL Pipeline, numerous Members of Congress have attempted to do so. It is estimated that the Tar Sands contain 360–510-billion tons of carbon. With continued Tar Sands expansion, greenhouse gas emissions from increased operations approached 108-megatons last year. Rep. Haaland represents one of the states that had Keystone progressed, faced a potential catastrophe. The Ogallala Aquifer extends from west Texas to the Dakotas and from Nebraska to New Mexico, and it is the key formation in the High Plains Aquifer system. Underlying 174,000-square miles of 8 states, the Ogallala Aquifer provides for 20% of the irrigated farmland in the US. Without that aquifer, the US loses its “breadbasket.” TransCanada’s proposed 274-miles of Keystone-XL Pipeline in Nebraska was, in places, to be laid where the aquifer is 10-feet or less underground. Scientists concluded that if the Ogallala Aquifer was contaminated by Tar Sands crude it would be “virtually impossible to restore” to a pristine state.

Rep. Haaland was aware of these facts. She was honest about the situation. And she knew the figures on supposed job creation were vastly exaggerated. This is the leadership that the American people need when decisions on extractive industry projects are being made. With Deb Haaland as Secretary of the Interior, we are confident that the Bureau of Land Management will also revert to its mission and cease to act as a realtor for multinational extractive industry corporations. Public lands are ancestral Indigenous territories, yet the original stakeholders have been omitted from any decision-making process and hence many sacred lands and mountain ranges have become pasture for livestock while the main species prospering on the great plains are nodding donkeys.

Due to systemic and institutional racism, Indigenous people, Black, Brown and Asian citizens, have been disenfranchised from our public lands, our wilderness areas, and many of our most iconic national parks. The countenance of God that John Muir spoke of being reflected in the mountains was white, and the faces remain so. It is long overdue that this fact was addressed. Similarly, many ESA listing and delisting decisions are “Trojan Horses” for tribal nations. The most recent example was the Trump Administration’s drive to delist the grizzly bear in Greater Yellowstone from the ESA. For tribes, this raised multiple threats, from sovereignty issues and treaty rights to religious and spiritual freedoms and the very foundation of the federal-Indian trust responsibility. Thankfully, tribal plaintiffs prevailed in federal court, but we seek to be partners with a Secretary of the Interior, not plaintiffs. Now we face another similar issue with the delisting of the grey wolf. Over 100 tribal nations have already signed a

treaty calling for consultation and participation in this process, and for Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) to be incorporated as an integral part of species' management plans.

For too long, the Department of the Interior has classified tribal consultation as a “dear tribal leader” letter. For even longer, the original stewards of this land have been ignored and our voices silenced. It is way overdue that an Indigenous person held the position of Secretary of the Interior, and we are proud to support Representative Deb Haaland to be that woman to make history.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Gerald Gray – Chairman, Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council.



Tom Rodgers – President, Global Indigenous Council.



A. Gay Kingman – Executive Director, Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Association.



William Snell, Jr. – Executive Director, Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council.



Rain Bear Stands Last – Executive Director, Global Indigenous Council.

cc. Senator Brian Schatz (HI), Chairman
Senator Lisa Murkowski (AK), Vice Chairman
Senator Maria Cantwell (WA)
Senator Catherine Cortez Masto (NV)
Senator Tina Smith (MN)
Senator Ben Ray Lujan (NM)

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