

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 6, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

We are writing to call for the cancellation of the September oil and gas lease sale across southern Utah that threatens 87,000 acres of outstanding red rock wilderness areas. We oppose this oil and gas sale due to its close proximity to units of the National Park System, fragile landscapes including Labyrinth Canyon, and other public lands near Canyonlands, Arches, and Capitol Reef National Parks. We urge you not to move forward with the sale of these leases due to the impact they will have on these lands.

These leases jeopardize the breathtaking views of nearby world-renown redrock canyons, mesas, and spires. Many of the proposed lease areas are less than two miles away from units of the National Park System, with some leases less than a half a mile away. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has acknowledged the environmental significance of many lands within this lease sale by stating they contain wilderness characteristics.

In 2008, the Department of Interior proposed to sell oil and gas leases across much of southern and eastern Utah, including some of these very same public lands. A federal court halted the lease because the Department failed to meet National Environmental Policy Act and National Historic Policy Act requirements for the lands. These leases were eventually cancelled due to environmental concerns with the leases.

Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, industry interest in leasing Utah's public lands had declined dramatically. At the past three lease sales in Utah, BLM sold just 47 percent of the more than 228,000 acres offered for lease. Of the acres that did sell, well over half sold for the minimum bid of \$2.00/acre. And, in Grand County—home to Arches and Canyonlands—all of the leases that sold went for the minimum bid, which earned the State of Utah less than \$9,000 in revenue.

At the same time, BLM has granted royalty relief to leases in Grand and San Juan Counties, including leases that are adjacent to the ones proposed for the September lease sale, in an attempt to further encourage development in the area. We request that you provide us with the companies seeking such relief and BLM's decisions regarding those requests.

Both Grand County and the City of Moab have asked BLM to cancel this lease sale citing the negligible economic benefit and significant risk to irreplaceable public lands. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to drive down demand for oil and gas leases on public lands. BLM recently cited the pandemic as the basis for postponing all six of the agency's oil and gas lease sales scheduled for May and June, including one in Utah. Similarly, the Utah School Institutional and Trust Lands Administration has canceled its last three oil and gas lease sales, in part due to continued industry effects from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to this reduced demand for oil and the environmental significance of lands within and near this lease sale, we ask that you cancel the upcoming sale.

Sincerely,



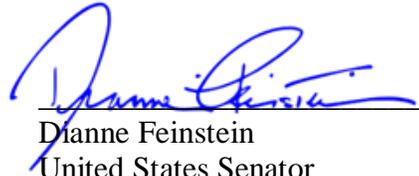
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United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



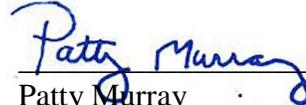
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

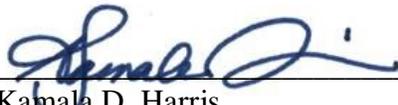


Patty Murray
United States Senator



Tom Udall
United States Senator

/s/ Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



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