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## President Trump nominates Colorado native David Bernhardt to be next Interior secretary

**Bernhardt is currently acting secretary of the giant agency**



David Zalubowski, The Associated Press

President Donald Trump announced on Twitter Monday that he is nominating David Bernhardt, a Rifle, Colorado, native, as secretary of the Interior.

By [John Aguilar](#) | [jaguilar@denverpost.com](mailto:jaguilar@denverpost.com) | The Denver Post

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Colorado native David Bernhardt, who has been the target of environmentalists for his years of work on behalf of the oil and gas industry, was tapped by President Trump on Monday to lead the Department of the Interior.

The president said on Twitter that Bernhardt, who has [worked at Interior for more than a decade over two stints](#), “has done a fantastic job from the day he arrived.” Bernhardt served as the No. 2

under former Secretary Ryan Zinke from [August of 2017](#) until being named acting secretary last month.



Bernhardt will need Senate confirmation to assume the top post at the 70,000-person agency, which oversees roughly half a billion acres of land in the United States.

Several environmental groups were quick to condemn the nomination. Center for Western Priorities Executive Director Jennifer Rokala called it “an affront to America’s parks and public lands.”

[RELATED: Colorado’s David Bernhardt on short list to be the next Interior secretary](#)

“As an oil and gas lobbyist, Bernhardt pushed to open vast swaths of public lands for drilling and mining,” she said in a statement. “As deputy secretary, he was behind some of the worst policy decisions of Secretary Zinke’s sad tenure, including stripping protections for imperiled wildlife.”

U.S. Sen. Cory Gardner, who sits on the Senate’s Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and other congressional Republicans from Colorado praised Trump’s choice Monday.

“I’ve known David Bernhardt for many years and have worked closely with him over the last two years to advance Colorado priorities,” Gardner said in a statement. “As a native Coloradan from the Western Slope, David knows how important public lands are to our state and has a keen understanding of the issues Coloradans face every day.”

But Rokala called Bernhardt, 49, a “walking conflict of interest” because of the work he has done representing energy and mining companies as well as large water interests — much of it as a lobbyist for Denver-based law firm Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck.

Condemnation of the nomination also came from the National Parks Conservation Association, The Mountain Pact and The Wilderness Society, which said that as head of Interior Bernhardt

“would further jeopardize our climate and communities across the country with his relentless mission to remove protections for land, water and wildlife.”

The Washington Post on Monday reported that during the 35-day partial government shutdown that ended Jan. 25, Bernhardt “employed novel tactics” to make sure oil and gas drilling permits could still be issued and instructed superintendents to use park fees to remedy pressing issues, like the buildup of trash and human waste inside national parks.

Bernhardt tweeted that it was a “humbling privilege to be nominated” and that he hopes to “accomplish the balanced, common sense vision of our President.”

Bernhardt, who grew up in Rifle, has a reputation in Washington for putting in long hours. He has been the agency’s acting secretary since the beginning of the year, following the [tumultuous resignation of his predecessor](#). Zinke faced federal investigations into his travel, political activity and potential conflicts of interest when he announced his resignation Dec. 15.



Rep. Doug Lamborn, who represents Colorado’s conservative 5th Congressional District, hailed the president’s choice, saying on Twitter that Bernhardt and the Interior Department “do great work in my home state of Colorado.”



**Rep. Doug Lamborn** ✓

@RepDLamborn



I hope Acting Secretary Bernhardt is confirmed quickly. He and the entire @Interior Department do great work in my home state of Colorado.

**Donald J. Trump** ✓ @realDonaldTrump

I am pleased to announce that David Bernhardt, Acting Secretary of the Interior, will be nominated as Secretary of the Interior. David has done a fantastic job from the day he arrived, and we look forward to having his nomination officially confirmed!

♥ 11 1:40 PM - Feb 4, 2019



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His message was echoed by Rep. Ken Buck, who said Bernhardt “brings tremendous leadership with him from our home state of #Colorado.”



**Congressman Ken Buck** ✓

@RepKenBuck



Great to see a Colorado native nominated to lead the Department of the @Interior! David Bernhardt @DOIDepSec brings tremendous leadership with him from our home state of #Colorado and I look forward to a swift confirmation process.

♥ 349 1:57 PM - Feb 4, 2019



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