Nominated in early March to replace former Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke, David Bernhardt testified in front of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on Thursday, March 28. He passed through the Committee on April 4 with a 14-6 vote even though he has long faced strong opposition from many Democratic Senators including Senator Chuck Schumer, who has said that an oil and gas lobbyist as the head of the Department of Interior (DOI) was "an example of swampiness in Washington if there ever was one." On Thursday, April 11, Bernhardt was confirmed by the Senate with a 56-41 vote. Bernhardt has been Acting Secretary since Ryan Zinke resigned amidst ethics scandals but has since been faced with several ethics scandals of his own. The former lobbyist has been questioned regarding his stance on offshore oil and gas drilling and endangered species protections reductions that would directly benefit a former client. The Colorado native has been working hard at the Department of Interior to pursue the Trump administration's 'energy dominance' agenda even before Ryan Zinke's resignation.

Many question Bernhardt's adherence to managing public lands with multiple uses in mind. His history at DOI suggests he is dedicated to only furthering the interests of the oil and gas industry. Bernhardt was instrumental in rolling back protections for greater sage-grouse, an iconic bird living in the sagebrush sea of the Western U.S.; has also worked to push oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; and played an important role in the reduction of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments, undermining years of collaborative and protective efforts. His confirmation will ensure that DOI's main goal will continue to be 'energy dominance' above all other uses of public lands. This focus puts western mountain communities at risk as their economies and culture are inextricably linked to public lands. We must keep the pressure on Bernhardt and DOI to better manage our public lands with all uses in mind.