

Udall, Heinrich call for end to Pendley's authority

Written by Staff Reports

Friday, 11 October 2019 09:45



Acting BLM Director supports selling off public lands

WASHINGTON - U.S. Sens. Tom Udall, D-N.M., lead Democrat on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies, and Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., a member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, joined a group of Senate Democrats Oct. 2 urging U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary David Bernhardt to terminate William Perry Pendley's authority as acting director of the Bureau of Land Management. In the letter, the senators outline their concerns with Pendley's advocacy for the widespread sale of

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public lands, his efforts to roll back key conservation laws, and his long-held disregard for the important role BLM plays in managing our public lands.

"Mr. Pendley is simply unfit to lead the BLM - repeatedly calling for the sale of public lands and the dismantling of critical protections for wildlife. New Mexico is proud of our millions of acres of public lands that support a thriving outdoor recreation economy and are home to iconic species including the desert bighorn to Gila trout. Protecting these wild spaces is critical to our rich natural inheritance, our economic success, and is part of an essential legacy to pass on to our children and future generations to come," Udall said.

"During his time as acting-director of BLM, Mr. Pendley has spearheaded the Interior Department's misguided BLM relocation efforts and the transfer of more than five hundred acres of public land, including hundreds in New Mexico, to the U.S. Army for construction of President Trump's border wall - all while avoiding congressional oversight. It is time for the president to nominate a permanent director who believes in the mission of the agency and who is willing to work with Congress to support the dedicated staff who work at the BLM and actually improve the effectiveness of the agency," he concluded.

"William Perry Pendley has made a career as a zealot, aligning himself with extremists and militants who led the armed standoff with the BLM - the agency he now oversees. He has explicitly called on the federal government to sell off millions of acres of the Western landscapes owned by all of us, and has routinely argued against tribal sovereignty. Pendley's beliefs are antithetical to the very idea of America's public lands and he is glaringly unqualified to run the BLM," Heinrich said. "For two and a half years, the Trump administration has failed to nominate a permanent director of the BLM, which oversees nearly a quarter billion acres of public lands including many treasured places in New Mexico like the Rio Grande del Norte and Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks. This action is an end-run around congressional oversight and Pendley's authority should be rescinded as Acting Director of the BLM until the president formally nominates someone."

"As the BLM considers a major reorganization, there is no reason for this effort to be led by an acting director who spent his career attempting to dismantle the agency. Keeping Mr. Pendley atop the BLM is an affront to all Americans who believe in the balanced, multiple use and sustained yield mission of the agency," wrote the senators in their letter.

"The American people deserve better. Therefore, we request that you rescind Mr. Pendley's

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authority as acting director of the BLM and that the President nominate a BLM Director with a true commitment to our public lands and waters," the letter continues.

In addition to Udall and Heinrich, the letter was signed by U.S. Sens. Michael Bennet, D-Colo., Jon Tester, D-Mont., Kamala Harris, D-Calif., Dianne Feinstein D-Calif., Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, Bernie Sanders, I-Vt. , Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., Edward Markey, D-Mass., and Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii.

In August, Udall [called on the DOI](#) to suspend its efforts to relocate BLM functions or positions and to work with Congress and other stakeholders to create a reorganization plan that will actually improve the effectiveness and accountability of the agency. In the last week of Sept., Udall advanced the Fiscal Year 2020 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill which did not include any new funding for BLM reorganization. The bill passed the committee and will now head to the full Senate.

The text of the letter follows:

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

We write to express our opposition to Mr. William Perry Pendley's continued role as Acting Director at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). BLM is a key partner across the country, managing vast expanses of public lands and the natural and cultural resources they contain. The American people deserve a leader at the BLM who will work on behalf of its mission. Mr. Pendley, however, is not that leader. Accordingly, we request that you terminate Mr. Pendley's acting director authority immediately.

For decades, Mr. Pendley has advocated for the widespread sale of public lands and fought to erode America's conservation legacy. In notes from his time with the Reagan Administration, Mr. Pendley wrote, "Sell all BLM lands E. of Miss." For nearly 30 years after that, Mr. Pendley continued to promote these ideas as President of the Mountain States Legal Foundation,

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fighting for expanded oil and gas development in wild places, fewer protections for critical wildlife, and less protected public land. Over the course of his career, he's argued for eliminating the Endangered Species Act, abolishing the Antiquities Act, and repealing laws that safeguard sportsmen's access. While writing five books focused on his view of western liberties, such as "War on the West" and "Sagebrush Rebel," Mr. Pendley failed to recognize that freedom for many Americans comes from the shared ownership of more than 600 million acres of public land.

As recently as 2016, Mr. Pendley wrote an article entitled, "The Federal Government Should Follow the Constitution and Sell Its Western Lands." In it, Pendley incorrectly argues that the Founding Fathers intended all lands owned by the federal government to be sold and suggests that obtaining title to public land and driving public land ownership down are laudable goals. The fact that Mr. Pendley recently defended this article by suggesting it was an academic exercise is exactly our concern. Such exercises - driven by Washington D.C. think tanks and special interests - are completely out of line with the views of a vast majority of Americans who realize that our public lands are critical to economic growth across the country, particularly in rural communities.

As the BLM considers a major reorganization, there is no reason for this effort to be led by an acting director who spent his career attempting to dismantle the agency. Keeping Mr. Pendley atop the BLM is an affront to all Americans who believe in the balanced, multiple use and sustained yield mission of the agency. While Mr. Pendley has said that "an oft-repeated truth...[is] to call the federal government the 'world's worst neighbor,'" we can think of no worse neighbor than one who spent the last thirty years trying to burn down the neighborhood.

The American people deserve better. Therefore, we request that you rescind Mr. Pendley's authority as acting director of the BLM and that the President nominate a BLM Director with a true commitment to our public lands and waters. Thank you for considering this request.

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