

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-4707**

Secretary Ryan Zinke  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

April 10, 2018

Dear Secretary Zinke:

Press reports from March 26, 2018, indicate that you have made several disturbing comments to high-ranking officials that diversity is not important and that you would not be proactively focused on encouraging diversity at the Department of the Interior (DOI).<sup>1</sup> These comments are particularly troubling, because, as the Secretary of the Interior, it is important that you set the tone that diverse voices are critical to the success of DOI. As a public official, you have a responsibility to ensure that both your agency and the public lands it administers are welcoming and inclusive to all people.

Rather than moving away from encouraging diversity, you should be working to recruit and hire individuals from all background in compliance with DOI's Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. Additional efforts should be made to fully implement this plan at all of DOI's various bureaus. For example, the National Park Service's Office of Relevancy, Diversity and Inclusion aims to ensure that the National Park Service (NPS) includes the full range of voices that one can hear in our great country. We urge you to use such resources to champion diversity at DOI including by growing park visitation and expanding efforts to increase access to public lands for historically underrepresented communities.

DOI and its bureaus play a critical role in preserving our nation's most treasured public lands, cultural resources and natural wonders. The National Park Service (NPS) in particular plays a fundamental role in engaging the public with our natural and cultural history of this country thanks to the national park system.

Under the guidance of DOI, for just over 100 years, NPS's mission has been, "to preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education and inspiration of this and future generations." The centennial of NPS and the initiatives and programs that proceeded from it not only celebrated 100 years of protecting our scenic and historic treasures, but proudly set forth a renewed commitment to the inclusive engagement of diverse communities, celebrating the people who make up the fabric of our country's history and future.

We saw the success of that commitment through the record-breaking number of visitors in 2016. More than 325 million people discovered and connected with the beauty, culture and history of our national park system in 2016—places like Little Bighorn National Monument in your home state of Montana, Klondike National Historic Park in Washington, Stonewall National Monument in New York, and the breathtaking Sleeping Bear Dunes along the expansive shore of Lake Michigan. Even with this increase in visitors overall, white non-Hispanics are staggeringly overrepresented at 78 percent of park users.

Currently, over half of all newborns in the United States belong to racial minorities; California, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, New Mexico and Texas are already majority-minority. These demographic shifts require innovative and collaborative approaches to best preserve public lands and cultural resources, and to facilitate a

strong, culturally responsive NPS. Undoubtedly, these efforts will be more comprehensive and successful when they are informed and led by members of diverse communities.

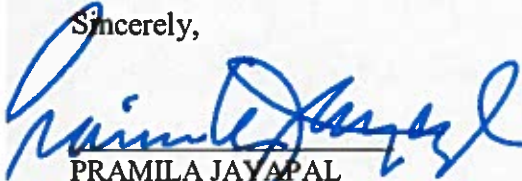
Commitment to initiatives like Every Kid in a Park and the Urban Agenda create accessible avenues for youth and families of all backgrounds to develop a deeper connection to not only public lands, but also to the story of our nation. Partnerships such as the Pathways Programs and various internships successfully help to mentor, train and empower the next generation of environmental stewards. Collaborations with historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), the Hispanic Access Foundation and the Youth Conservation Corps intentionally seek to increase the visibility of conservation and cultural resource leaders, and inspire future leaders who reflect the increasingly diverse population of the United States. Programs like these create opportunities for young leaders to find their voice and passion for nature, culture, history and community in a way that leverages the resources of NPS and the expertise and relationships of partner organizations. Through mutually beneficial, meaningful relationships and focused recruitment, these programs offer opportunities for people of color to make themselves heard and to meaningfully engage with the system.

Even with focused programs aimed at increasing access for underrepresented populations, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, as of September 30, 2016, 80.7 percent of full time, non-seasonal, permanent employees are white.


With continued investment in focused initiatives such as Find Your Park and the Spanish-language *Encuentra Tu Parque*, inclusive and intentional engagement of communities of color will guarantee higher numbers of visitors, an increase in cultural and natural resource stewards, and economic growth. According to the Outdoor Industry Association's 2017 National Recreation Economy Report, in 2016 the outdoor recreation economy generated \$887 billion in consumer spending and supported 7.6 million jobs. This meant \$65.3 billion generated in federal tax revenue and \$59.2 billion in local and state taxes. For every national park job added, two jobs are created in the local economy. Focusing on expanding and diversifying park visitation and employment will continue to build economic growth in the outdoor recreation economy.

The face of the United States is changing and without substantial investment in efforts to increase diversity and shift practices to foster a more inclusive culture throughout DOI, many Americans will not feel represented. We urge you to increase diversity and inclusion through equity-based, goal-oriented, measurable strategies both in our parks and throughout DOI.

Sincerely,




PRAMILA JAYAPAL  
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress




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Member of Congress



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EARL BLUMENAUER  
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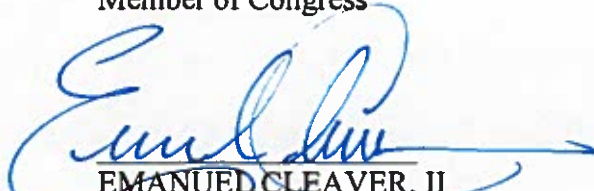
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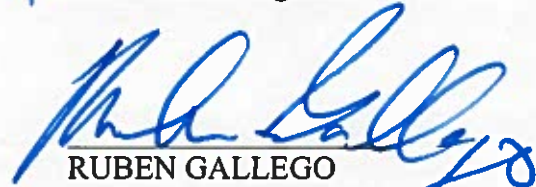
  
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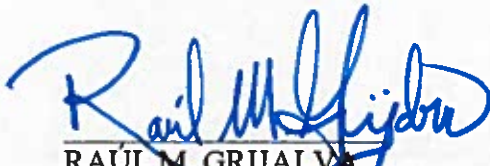
  
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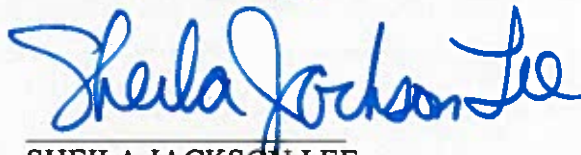
  
KEITH ELLISON  
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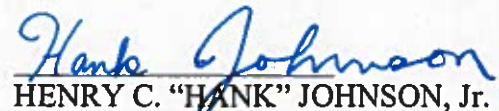
  
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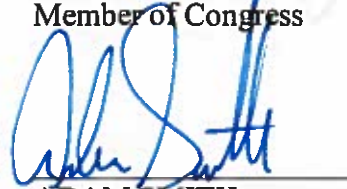
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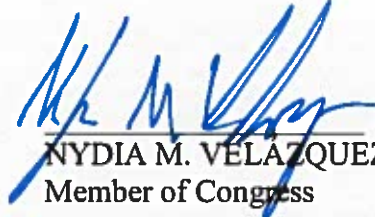
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<sup>1</sup> Ganim, Sara. "Sources: Zinke Tells Employees Diversity Isn't Important." CNN Politics, Cable News Network, 26 Mar. 2018, [www.cnn.com/2018/03/26/politics/ryan-zinke-diversity/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2018/03/26/politics/ryan-zinke-diversity/index.html).