

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
BUDGET
ENERGY AND
NATURAL RESOURCES
INTELLIGENCE
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

January 11, 2019

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

Dear Acting Secretary Bernhardt:

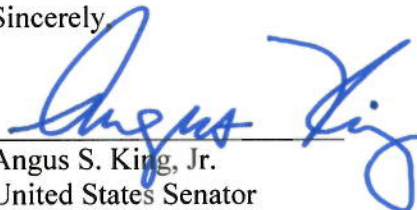
As the Ranking Member of the National Parks Subcommittee on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I write with concerns regarding the safety of the visitors and the potential environmental harm to the national park units during the on-going government shutdown.

As the public continues to access the country's national parks under the Interior Department's decision to leave most park units accessible, but in a scenario of a government shutdown where 16,000 of the park service's 19,000 workers are furloughed, there are obvious concerns for the safety of visitors to popular park destinations. For example, there are already reports of some visitors getting into dangerous, life threatening, and even deadly situations that would have otherwise not occurred in normal operating circumstances. I respect that the National Park Service is in a difficult place of attempting to operate in some capacity during the shutdown that Congress continues to work to resolve, and that park units remaining accessible is important to many economies that surround popular parks. However, it is critical that the Park Service takes public safety seriously in this scenario where so many park employees are furloughed. I ask that you please provide details of what the Park Service is doing to maintain public safety during this shutdown where so few park employees and emergency response capabilities are available.

Further, there are troubling reports of potentially irreversible environmental degradation happening in the national parks. The language of the Organic Act which created the National Park Service in 1916 states the mission of the Park Service is to conserve these places and "leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations," and many are concerned that, without the proper park employees in place, more serious environmental damage may be done to these important and beloved places. I ask that you please provide in detail how the Park Service plans to address such damage, and prevent further damage during this shutdown scenario.

I understand that these are trying circumstances for the government agencies that are being impacted by the shutdown. It is my hope that by working together we can be sure the public is being served in the best way possible under the regrettable shutdown circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Sincerely,



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator