

## **CONFIRMING DAVID BERNHARDT AS INTERIOR SECRETARY**

Passed: 56-41

### **SUMMARY:**

The Senate confirmed David Bernhardt, a former lobbyist for extractive industries and developers, as secretary of the Department of the Interior (DOI). (*April 11, 2019, Roll Call No. 77*)

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Interior Department is responsible for managing and conserving the majority of U.S. federal lands and natural resources. DOI oversees the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service and other agencies charged with making important decisions concerning wildlife, public lands management and implementing federal conservation laws and regulations.

The confirmation of Bernhardt as secretary of DOI poses serious concerns for the future of wildlife conservation, habitat protection and protecting our natural heritage from harmful industrial uses. Bernhardt's history as a lobbyist for extractive industries and developers calls into question his ability to balance the needs of our wildlife, public lands and scarce water resources with pressure from big polluters for more access and less regulation. His former lobbying firm—Brownstein, Hyatt, Farber, and Schreck—has a significant financial stake in the Cadiz water project, which seeks to pump water from an aquifer beneath California's fragile desert and sell it to water agencies in southern California. The project will require permits from DOI. As secretary, Bernhardt will be in position to approve it.

While serving as solicitor of DOI under President George W. Bush, Bernhardt authored an opinion stating that the department could not use the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to address the threats of climate change to polar bears, even if the species was protected under the act. During his previous tenure at DOI he was also associated with a series of investigations conducted by the department's inspector general, including a report that concluded that staff within the department were interfering with the scientific integrity of the ESA.

### **OUTCOME:**

On April 11, 2019, the Senate confirmed oil and gas lobbyist David Bernhardt's nominator as Secretary of the Department of Interior. "No" was the pro-conservation vote.