

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 7, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum:

We urge you to immediately reissue seasonal employment offers for the National Park Service, officially rescind damaging and short-sighted deferred resignation and early retirement offers, and to instead work to safeguard, grow, and shape the National Park Service workforce to meet the needs of our national parks and their visitors.

We are alarmed that the National Park Service revoked employment offers for seasonal staff for the upcoming summer season. Incoming seasonal staff – whose work is critical to managing the influx of visitors during the summer “peak season” – had offers in their hands that were yanked away just days after the inauguration.

National Park Service rangers carry out a wide array of functions critical to protecting natural resources, keeping visitors safe, providing for recreation, and creating an inspiring and educational experience for visitors. National Park units experience a summer surge in visitation that peaks in July, and the Service hires more than 6,000 seasonal employees to manage that extra work. Without seasonal staff during this peak season, visitor centers may close, bathrooms will be filthy, campgrounds may close, guided tours will be cut back or altogether cancelled, emergency response times will drop, and visitor services like safety advice, trail recommendations, and interpretation will be unavailable.

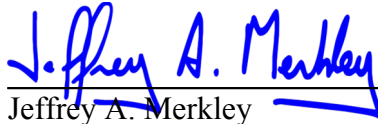
We are also alarmed that the administration’s offer of deferred resignation and voluntary early retirement, made without clear legal authority, as well as open threats about future terminations will lead to a damaging loss of full-time staff at the National Park Service, which is already operating well below prior staffing levels despite significant increases in visitation. As a result of onerous budget caps during the 2010s, the National Park Service lost 15% of its staff while park visitation also increased by 15%. If a significant number of National Park Service employees take one of the offers – or further terminations are made – park staffing will be in chaos. Not only does this threaten the full suite of visitor services, but could close entire parks altogether.

Gutting staffing at national park units will devastate local “gateway” communities where parks generate significant economic activity – from hotels to restaurants to stores to outfitters. In 2023, an estimated 325 million park visitors spent an estimated \$26.4 billion in local gateway regions, supporting an estimated 415,000 jobs and \$55.6 billion in total economic output in the national economy.

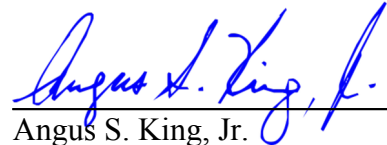
Americans showing up to national parks this summer and for years to come don’t deserve to have their vacations ruined by a completely preventable – and completely irresponsible – staffing

shortage. And local economies don't deserve to have their livelihoods destroyed for political gain. We urge your cooperation in protecting national parks for the enjoyment of everyone by ensuring National Park Service staffing meets the needs of the 433 national park units in all 50 states.

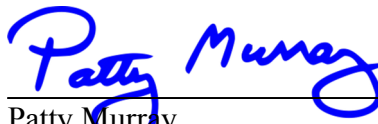
Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related
Agencies
Committee on Appropriations



Angus S. King, Jr.
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National
Parks
Energy & Natural
Resources Committee



Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations



Martin Heinrich
Ranking Member
Energy & Natural Resources
Committee



Jon Ossoff
United States Senator



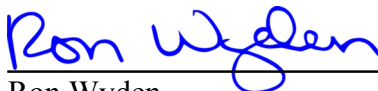
John Fetterman
United States Senator



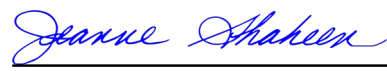
Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



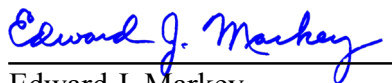
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
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Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator