



January 14, 2021

Congressman Pete Stauber
Eighth Congressional District
State of Minnesota
126 Cannon HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Stauber,

As tribal leaders in the 8th District, we write today to express our profound disappointment after learning that you are leading an effort in the House of Representatives to oppose the appointment of Representative Deb Haaland as the first American Indian Secretary of Interior.

This historic nomination is more important to us and all of Indian country than any other Cabinet nomination in recent history. There are 574 federally recognized tribes in the United States, each with our own distinct governance structure, inherent tribal sovereignty, language, culture, and land base. While it is rare that there is nearly unanimous agreement on any issue, Tribes have proven that supporting the nomination of Rep. Haaland is as close as Indian country has ever come to having one unified position. As Ranking Minority Member on the House Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples, your opposition to the first and only American Indian ever nominated to a Cabinet position is likely to reverberate across Indian country.

Most concerning is that you did not consult with us as the sovereign federally recognized tribal governments in your District in advance of initiating this effort that has such a direct impact on us as your American Indian constituents. Yet it appears you did consult with industrial interests in the 8th District. In your position, Representative Stauber, you represent us and our tribal citizens who are dually citizens of our five Bands and citizens of Minnesota. Collectively, the five tribal governments in your district are the largest employers in the 8th District and the vast majority of jobs we have created are held by non-Native people. Out of respect for our tribal sovereignty, our government-to-government relationship, our relevancy as a powerful economic engine and our friendship, our voice deserved equal consideration prior to you taking these actions, but you did not provide us with that opportunity.

The Secretary of Interior has incredible influence over federal Indian policies, government-to-government relationships, and the implementation of the federal government's trust responsibility to Indian Tribes established by Treaties. The Department of Interior touches almost every facet of Indian Affairs affecting Tribes and their members through the Bureau of Indian Education, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Trust Funds Management, Bureau of Land Management, public lands managed by the National Park Service, and so forth.

Having a Secretary of Interior who is a citizen of Laguna Pueblo, with a tribal perspective, knowledge of tribal sovereignty, and experience chairing the House Natural Resources subcommittee with oversight of the Department, will propel the Department into a better position to serve Tribal Nations. The Secretary is integral in the “Fee-to-Trust” land transfer process, which results in restoration of lands within our reservations. An understanding of the challenges of the allotment era and further fractionization and loss of tribal lands will only be a strength that Rep. Haaland will bring to the Secretary position. Further, the Department processes leases, through 638 compacts and self-governance contracts with Tribes, for individual tribal member families on Tribal Trust Land *held by the United States of America in Trust for the benefit of the respective Bands* that you represent. Ultimately, Indian Tribes are eager to see how Rep. Haaland in her appointment as the Secretary will lead and transform the function of many Interior divisions on behalf of Tribes and enhance self-determination and self-governance within this next Administration.


The obligation for the federal government to meaningfully consult with Indian Tribes on a government-to-government basis is based on the U.S. Constitution and Federal Treaties, statutes, executive orders, and policies. Out of respect for our relationship with you as the sovereign Native Nations in your district, we would have expected outreach from you in advance so we could have discussed this issue.

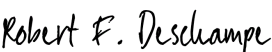
We respectfully request that you reconsider your position on this matter.


Sincerely,


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Melanie Benjamin
Chief Executive
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe

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Cathy Chavers
Chairwoman
Bois Forte Band of Chippewa

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Robert F. Deschampe
Chairman
Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

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Kevin R. Dupuis, Sr.
Chairman
Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

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Faron Jackson, Sr.
Chairman
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe