

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

May 1, 2020

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear President Trump and Secretary Bernhardt,

Our nation is in crisis, struggling against a viral threat of unprecedented proportion, and against disruptions that have thrown American lives and livelihoods into disarray. Social distancing guidelines have closed schools, businesses, and public buildings, but these changes are not trivial, and they are not made lightly.

Americans make these sacrifices to protect ourselves and one another from the deadly threat of the coronavirus pandemic. Countless citizens accept stay at home orders to flatten the curve and ensure that this disease cannot prey on the most vulnerable in our society. This silent effort of millions of our fellow citizens deserves commendation, as do the brave men and women whose work on the frontlines in hospitals and grocery stores supports our health and well-being. I am proud that we are weathering this storm together and taking steps to care for one another.

But amidst this sacrifice, you, Mr. President, have planned, and you, Mr. Secretary, have allowed, a campaign-style town hall on “returning to work” from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, a monument on the National Mall, which is closed for events until May 15th, within the District of Columbia, which experiences increasing COVID-19 cases until at least June.^{1, 2, 3} Much like your

¹ Concha, J. (2020, April 29). Fox News to host ‘America Together: Returning to Work’ town hall with Trump. *The Hill*. Retrieved from <https://thehill.com/homenews/media/495296-fox-news-to-host-america-together-returning-to-work-town-hall-with-trump>

² National Park Service. (2020, April 28). Record of Determination – May 2020 NAMA COVID-19 Closures. Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/nama/learn/management/record-of-determination-may-2020-nama-covid-19-closures.htm>

³ NBC Washington Staff. (2020, April 29). DC May Not Reopen for Another 3 Months, Officials Say. *NBC 4 Washington*. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/dc-may-not-reopen-for-another-3-months-officials-say/2288790/>

efforts to keep national parks open and to avoid closing businesses, this sort of “leadership” is out of touch with what Americans want or need.⁴

From the beginning of this pandemic, your administration failed to take this crisis seriously, wasting precious months that should have been spent stockpiling ventilators and masks, and coordinating with State health officials on emergency planning.⁵ All the while you compared coronavirus to the seasonal flu.⁶

When you finally saw the imminent danger this virus posed to American lives, you begrudgingly took action, but your false assurances about the availability of testing, the relative severity of the virus, and the timetable for recovery left many confused and unprepared for this new normal.^{7, 8, 9}

Since then, your frequent, antagonistic briefing appearances have only sown further confusion. You routinely disagree with your own senior health officials, leaving Americans questioning what they can safely do, and you insist we reopen the country even when it will likely cause a spike in cases.¹⁰ You even suggested Americans might use disinfectant or somehow ingest ultraviolet radiation to cure this disease.¹¹ Your staggering lack of consistency and your willingness to ignore science have undoubtedly prolonged this crisis and cost American lives.

Hosting a town hall event from the steps of a functionally closed national memorial only serves to continue this pattern of confusion and misinformation. Using your position as President to flout public health mandates, park closures, and park permitting processes to discuss reopening America is highly inappropriate while case numbers are on the rise here in D.C., in my home state of Arizona, and in towns, counties, and cities across the nation. I assure you, Mr. President, that opening the country too soon is not in America’s best interest, even if you think it is in your political interest.

At best, holding an unpermitted event at the Lincoln Memorial will encourage a crowd at a closed federal memorial, potentially endangering those who gather to look on. At worst, this campaign style event will signal to millions that they no longer need to social distance. I can tell you

⁴ Ellis, N.T. (2020, April 23). Trump plans to reopen national parks as coronavirus restrictions ease. *USA Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/2020/04/23/trump-plans-reopen-national-parks-coronavirus-restrictions-ease/3010704001/>

⁵ Biesecker, M. (2020, April 6). US ‘wasted’ months before preparing for coronavirus pandemic. *AP*. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/090600c299a8cf07f5b44d92534856bc>

⁶ Egan, L. (2020, February 28). Trump calls coronavirus Democrats’ ‘new hoax’. *NBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-calls-coronavirus-democrats-new-hoax-n1145721>

⁷ Valverde, M. (2020, March 11). Donald Trump’s wrong claim that ‘anybody’ can get tested for coronavirus. *Politifact*. Retrieved from <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2020/mar/11/donald-trump/donald-trumps-wrong-claim-anybody-can-get-tested-c/>

⁸ Gore, D. (2020, April 29). Trump’s COVID-19 Testing Claim Is Way Off. *Factcheck.org*. Retrieved from <https://www.factcheck.org/2020/04/trumps-covid-19-testing-claim-is-way-off/>

⁹ Bump, P. (2020, April 28). Yet again, Trump pledges that the coronavirus will simply go away. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/04/28/yet-again-trump-pledges-that-coronavirus-will-simply-go-away/>

¹⁰ Samuels, B. (2020, April 25). Trump coronavirus briefings put health officials in bind. *The Hill*. Retrieved from <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/494574-trump-coronavirus-briefings-put-health-officials-in-bind>

¹¹ Jacobs, A. (2020, April 27). Trump Disinfectant Remarks Echo Claims by Miracle-Cure Quacks. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/27/health/coronavirus-disinfectant-bleach-trump.html>

from experience that it was hard enough to close our national parks and public spaces the first time; with your tacit approval, millions may leave their homes, endangering themselves and those vulnerable to severe illness, creating an ideal situation for a second viral spike.¹²

Mr. President, I implore you to cancel your appearance and to ensure that any efforts made to reopen our country are in accordance with the guidance of your senior public health advisors, not just your short-term political interest. Take inspiration from the man who gives name to the memorial you plan to utilize. Now is not a time for politics. Now is a time to lead, even though it may be difficult.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
House Committee on Natural Resources

¹² Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva. (2020, April 2). Chair Grijalva: Trump Admin Has No Explanation for Waiting Several Days to Close Grand Canyon National Park After Explicit Call from Health Officials [Press Release]. Retrieved from <https://grijalva.house.gov/press-releases/chair-grijalva-trump-admin-has-no-explanation-for-waiting-several-days-to-close-grand-canyon-national-park-after-explicit-call-from-health-officials/>