



Bernhardt advances to full Senate vote despite questions of blatant corruption

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TAGGED: [BERNHARDT](#), [DRAIN THE SWAMP](#), [INTERIOR DEPARTMENT](#), [LOBBYIST](#)



The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee today voted 14-6 to move the nomination of Acting Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, a former Westlands Water District and oil industry lobbyist, to a full Senate vote, setting the stage for a contentious and heated debate.



By Dan Bacher

In his lobbying disclosures, Bernhardt has listed "potential legislation regarding the Bureau of

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According to a story I broke here in January, a fish survey that the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) conducts every autumn turned up zero Delta smelt — the very same fish that Bernhardt is trying to strip protections for — throughout the monitoring sites in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta in September, October, November and December 2018.

- [Even Swamp Monsters Are Shocked by DOI Admin Bernhardt's Corruption](#)

"It's no surprise that a group of Senators who owe so much to special interest lobbyists would support this choice for Interior Secretary," said Western Values Project's Executive Director Chris Saeger in a statement in response to the committee's vote. "For the last two years, conflict-ridden David Bernhardt has tipped the scales in favor of former clients, likely violating his ethics pledge and responsibilities to the American people."

"Western Senators Heinrich, Gardner, McSally, and Daines greased the wheels to push Bernhardt's controversial nomination forward before getting clear answers to critical questions regarding his serious conflicts of interests. There is still time for them to reverse this mistake by voting to reject Bernhardt on the floor of the Senate. Until that happens, they will have to live with being known as full-throated supporters of Trump's conflicted ex-lobbyist pick to run our nation's public lands," Saeger.

During Bernhardt's hearing, Senators were unable to get clarification on several key conflicts of interest questions [raised](#) by Western Values Project. In addition, [calls](#) by Senator Wyden and others to delay his vote based on "serious concerns regarding Bernhardt's culture of corruption" were ignored, said Saeger.

Two Democrats, Senators Joe Manchin (WV) and Mark Heinrich (NM), and Independent Angus King (ME) joined with every Republican on the committee in voting to confirm Bernhardt. Western Senators Martha McSally (AZ), Cory Gardner (CO), and Steve Daines (MT) also supported the former lobbyist, according to Saeger.

The Washington Post [reported](#) this week that, at the request of two watchdog groups and several Senators, Interior's Office of Inspector General is reviewing evidence that Bernhardt violated his ethics pledge when he acted on behalf of a former client, [Westlands Water District](#).

Then today new details [released](#) by the *New York Times* revealed that Bernhardt had continued to associate with the water district at least until his deputy secretary nomination on April 28, 2017, according to Saeger. Within four months of his confirmation as Interior Deputy Secretary, Bernhardt [pushed](#) for a decision that would be beneficial for his former client.

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“The bill for Mr. Bernhardt’s services, dated March 2017 and labeled ‘Federal Lobbying,’ shows, along with other documents, Mr. Bernhardt working closely with the Westlands Water District as late as April 2017, the month Mr. Trump nominated him to his current job, deputy interior secretary. In November 2016, Mr. Bernhardt had filed legal notice with the federal government formally ending his status as lobbyist,” Davenport wrote.

Western Values Project (WVP) [filed suit](#) against the Interior Department in July of 2018 for public documents related to Bernhardt’s involvement with his former lobbying firm and clients. “Interior has been stonewalling the release of the documents and only now begun releasing preliminary documents related to the ten requests and comply with the joint status agreement,” said Saeger.

In response to the New York Times article’s revelations about Bernhardt’s lobbying for Westlands after he began working for Interior, Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla, Executive Director of Restore the Delta, said: “Our friends at Pacific Advocates confirmed what we suspected — that Trump’s nominee for Secretary of Interior, David Bernhardt, was lobbying for Westlands Water District after going to work for the Trump Administration. Invoices show he was busying lobbying for weakening endangered species protections and water rights for the Bay-Delta estuary.”

She also pointed out how Senator Dianne Feinstein was in contact with Bernhardt and Westlands regarding the weakening of Delta protections.

“During his period of double employment and conflict of interest, Senator Feinstein’s office was in contact with him and Westland’s General Manager Tom Birmingham on this weakening of Delta protections,” Barrigan-Parrilla stated. “This pains us because we thought we saw movement in Senator Feinstein’s thinking on Delta management.”

“While she opposed the twin tunnels, she seems fine with just pumping all the water away and destroying Delta fisheries, part of our historical and cultural legacy, and our water quality for public health protections. That’s not a better solution for the Delta. Her staff knew the nominee for Interior had conflicted interests and engaged with him regardless of his status, but Delta leaders seldom hear from her office. We expect better Senator Feinstein,” she concluded.

On March 19, a coalition of California fishing groups, conservation organizations and the Winnemem Wintu Tribe sent a [letter](#) to Senator Dianne Feinstein seeking an investigation and public disclosure of acting interior secretary Bernhardt’s role in granting the powerful Westlands Water District a permanent water supply contract. The groups also demanded that

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“Questions about a broad range of potential conflicts have been submitted by other Senators to the Inspector General and there have been numerous, publicly-reported conflicts of interest, violations of ethics recusals, and a pattern of repeated favoritism Mr. Bernhardt has extended to almost all of his former clients.”

“All of the potential conflicts need to be assessed, but our specific emphasis herein is to urge you to investigate two concerns of unique importance to California: (1) Westlands’ pending request for a permanent water supply contract for more than 1 Million Acre-feet (MAF) and (2) the repayment of \$84.8 million in federal taxpayer dollars, paid by Interior to cover Westlands’ (and three other federal water contractors’) Delta water tunnel costs,” the letter states.

The coalition sending the letter included: the Crab Boat Owners Association, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Association, AquAlliance, Environmental Water Caucus, Winnemem Wintu Tribe, Sierra Club California, Southern California Watershed Alliance, Institute for Fisheries Resources, CA Save our Streams Council, California Water Impact Network, Save the American River Association, Local Agencies of the Delta, Restore the Delta, North Coast Rivers Alliance and California Sportfishing Protection Alliance and Planning and Conservation League.

Then on March 26, more than 160 conservation groups sent a [letter](#) to U.S. senators urging them to oppose the nomination of fossil fuel lobbyist David Bernhardt as Interior secretary, citing his “efforts to enrich corporations at the expense of the environment.”

The latest revelations about Bernhardt’s enormous conflicts of interest takes place at a critical time for salmon, Delta smelt and other San Francisco Bay Delta fish populations. For the first time ever, a fish survey that the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) conducts every autumn turned up zero Delta smelt throughout the monitoring sites in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta in September, October, November and December 2018.

The smelt, a 2 to 3 inch fish listed under both federal and state Endangered Species Acts that was once the most abundant fish in the Delta, is found only in the Delta estuary. It is regarded as an indicator species, a fish that demonstrates the health of the entire Delta ecosystem.

- [Background: Trump’s nominee for Interior Secretary comes with a ton of ethical baggage](#)

Action! What you can do:

Write your Senators – tell them to vote NO on Bernhardt. We don’t need another lobbyist in

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Take Action!

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For more ways to take action to oppose Bernhardt's nomination, go here: actionnetwork.org/...

More of our coverage of David Bernhardt:

- [Sen Wyden calls for federal investigation of DOI nominee David Bernhardt's corrupt lobbying](#)
- [Even Swamp Monsters Are Shocked by DOI Admin Bernhardt's Corruption](#)
- [Trump's nominee for Interior Secretary comes with a ton of ethical baggage](#)
- [Bernhardt advances to full Senate vote despite questions of blatant corruption](#)
- [Senate will vote on Bernhardt for DOI – as House investigates his corruption](#)
- [Tell your Senators: Vote NO on Bernhardt for Interior Secretary \(We don't need another lobbyist\)](#)
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Tell your Senators: Vote NO on Bernhardt for Interior Secretary (We don't need another lobbyist)



About the Author

[Dan Bacher](#) Dan Bacher is an environmental journalist in Sacramento who focuses on California's water issues, a healthy environment for the salmon fishery of the Northwest, and the attempts by big agriculture and big oil to hog all the water.

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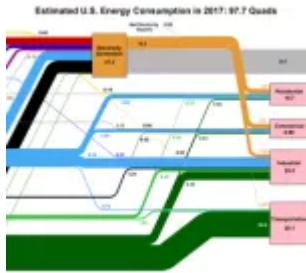
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We shattered a CO2 record last month. Here's how we can build a Green New Deal.

May 05, 2019

It's impossible to talk about infrastructure without talking about the Green New Deal. For the purpose of these diaries, we will refer to the version(1) of the Green New Deal put out by Rep. Ocasio-Cortez in H.Res. 109. This bill calls for the United States to convert to 100% renewable energy within 10 years through a massive mobilization on the order [...]



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