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November 20, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Burgum:

I am writing to express serious concern about reports that the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) may not grant backpay to National Park Service (NPS) seasonal employees furloughed during the 2025 government shutdown and urge you to immediately authorize backpay.

As you know, NPS relies on thousands of seasonal employees each summer and shoulder season to fill essential roles across the agency. They serve as rangers, camp hosts, maintenance crews, researchers, and staff for visitor centers, campgrounds, trails, waysides, and entrance stations. Seasonal staff are often the first and last points of contact for visitors at more than 430 national park units, making them an indispensable part of the agency's workforce and the overall visitor experience at America's most iconic destinations.

Despite this critical work, seasonal employees are often paid low wages and struggle with high living costs in remote or expensive park communities. These employees remained available during the shutdown. They choose this work not for financial gain, but out of dedication to America's national parks and a desire to preserve and share our nation's history.

These realities make reports that your department may not issue backpay for seasonal employees especially troubling. Not only does withholding pay irreparably harm some of the NPS's most vulnerable staff at a time of immense difficulty and uncertainty, it discourages future applicants and further strains the NPS's ability to recruit the skilled, committed employees the agency and the American public depend on.

Section 116 of Division A of the Continuing Appropriations Act of 2026 (2026 CR) provides retroactive pay pursuant to 31 U.S.C. 1341(c) to Federal employees affected by the 2025 government shutdown, including furloughed employees and employees required to perform excepted work. Seasonal workers are federal employees, and withholding pay is counter to the 2026 CR and therefore in violation of existing law.

Because the human resources functions of each DOI bureau have been consolidated under the Office of the Secretary and are now ultimately your sole responsibility, I urge you to immediately instruct DOI to issue backpay for the affected seasonal employees furloughed during the 2025 government shutdown.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Michael F. Bennet", written over a horizontal line.

Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

Cc: Rachel Borra, Chief Human Capital Officer, U.S. Department of the Interior  
Maureen Foster, Acting Assistant Secretary of Fish and Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Department of the Interior  
Jessica Bowron, Acting Director, National Park Service