

March 8, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Minority Leader
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Filling the Supreme Court Vacancy

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Reid:

President Obama has announced that he will nominate a replacement for the vacancy on the Supreme Court bench left by the passing of Justice Antonin Scalia, and we believe the President has a clearly prescribed constitutional responsibility to do so. On behalf of our millions of members and supporters, we call on the United States Senate to commit to doing its job by conducting fair confirmation hearings and holding a timely vote on that nominee.

In November 2012, the American public gave the President another four-year term that does not expire until noon on January 20, 2017. In doing so, Americans entrusted in President Obama the right and responsibility to fill any vacancies on the Supreme Court through the entirety of his term. To ensure a fully functioning legal system, the Senate must do its job by carrying out its end of this process. There is ample precedent for a nominee to be confirmed in election years, even when the Senate and White House are controlled by opposite political parties. Willful obstructionism is simply a dereliction of duty, and not what the American people expect from their elected representatives.

For the protection of our air, water, wildlife and lands, a strong and intact judiciary system is as important as ever. In an era when powerful interests who profit from pollution have an unprecedented level of access and influence, it is imperative that we have functioning courts – particularly our nation's highest. With so many critical issues expected to come before the Supreme Court, including those dealing with public health and environmental safeguards, this is not the time to hobble our judiciary with extended vacancies caused by political gamesmanship.

Sincerely,

Cindy Shogan
Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League

Kierán Suckling
Executive Director, Center for Biological Diversity

Robert Wendelgass
President and CEO, Clean Water Action

Jamie Rappaport Clark
President and CEO, Defenders of Wildlife

Trip Van Noppen
President, Earthjustice

Margie Alt
Executive Director, Environment America

Michael Noble
Executive Director, Fresh Energy

Erich Pica
President, Friends of the Earth

Mark Magaña
President, GreenLatinos

Annie Leonard
Executive Director, Greenpeace USA

Gene Karpinski
President, League of Conservation Voters

Rhea Suh
President, Natural Resources Defense Council

Catherine Thomasson, MD
Executive Director, Physicians for Social Responsibility

Robert Weissman
President, Public Citizen

Michael Brune
Executive Director, Sierra Club

Ken Berlin
President and CEO, The Climate Reality Project

Peggy M. Shepard
Executive Director, WE ACT for Environmental Justice