



April 18, 2011

JOHN A. KITZHABER, MD  
Governor

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for your hard work with Democrat and Republican leadership crafting a bipartisan budget package and averting a federal government shutdown. As the proposed Continuing Resolution (CR) moves to you for final consideration, I write to express serious concern over the inclusion of policy language unrelated to the budget. Specifically, using policy “riders” within the budget to de-list gray wolves in the Northern Rockies region from the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and eliminate the Free Choice Voucher program within the Affordable Care Act sets a highly undesirable precedent for making decisions on important social and natural resource issues that deserve open and informed debate.

A six-month budget resolution negotiated through backroom discussions is clearly the wrong vehicle to make permanent changes to significant public policy. For nearly 40 years, the Endangered Species Act has assured decisions about our nation’s natural heritage are driven by science, fish and wildlife professionals, and public input. Removing protection for an endangered species by congressional mandate, much less through a budget bill, stands in unprecedented contrast to this history. This action erodes the integrity of the ESA, excludes important public involvement, and usurps the agency structure, established based on a balancing of executive and legislative branch power, that exists to undertake important decisions affecting America’s wildlife.

Similarly, budget negotiations are no place to decide health care policy. Improving the delivery of health care, reducing costs and improving outcomes are of critical importance to working people across Oregon and America. The ink is barely dry on the Affordable Care Act, and the Free Choice Voucher program would have improved access to more affordable health care by increasing flexibility and expanding choices. It’s the wrong time and wrong process to undo important policy gains.

I raise the above matters as specific examples of bad precedent to be avoided in the future. The urgency surrounding the federal budget is no excuse for tacking on non-budgetary issues that deserve their own venue and public debate. I look forward to discussing how to avoid repeating such an approach to policy decision-making.

Sincerely,

John A. Kitzhaber, M.D.  
Governor

c: Oregon Congressional Delegation  
Ken Salazar, U.S. Department of Interior  
Robyn Thorson, USFWS, Pacific Region Director

JAK:bb:lj