



STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

KRISTI NOEM | GOVERNOR

February 22, 2020

The Honorable John Thune  
Dirksen Senate Office Bldg #511  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Thune,

I am writing to ask for your assistance in sharing the importance of the Mount Rushmore Fireworks Celebrations to South Dakota and combatting efforts from those who wish to discontinue these celebrations permanently.

On July 3, 2020, we held the first fireworks celebration in a decade. As one of the most well-known monuments in the entire country, it is fitting that Mount Rushmore should play a prominent role in our nation's Independence Day celebrations—and visitors flocked from around the country to celebrate with us. The event put a national spotlight on the grandeur of Mount Rushmore and ensured that South Dakota was front and center in the minds of potential visitors.

In addition to showcasing some of the best our state has to offer, the Mount Rushmore Fireworks Celebrations are an economic boon for the state. This summer's event on July 3 carried an advertising value of more than \$22 million, according to the most conservative estimates, and several broadcast programs experienced historic ratings due to the event. Google searches for "Mount Rushmore" reached an all-time high—1,250% higher than the previous record—and web traffic to the South Dakota Department of Tourism website increased by 872% compared to last year. Visitors spent over \$2 million in South Dakota as a direct result of this event, which generated \$160,000 in tax revenues for state and local governments.

Critics suggest that this event poses safety risks to the park and the surrounding areas—concerns that I take very seriously. As you know, our state takes great pride in our work to care for all the natural resources and public lands that fall between our borders. According to the [National Park Service](#), a significant wildfire has not occurred in the area surrounding Mount Rushmore in more than a century. When weather conditions have not been favorable to the fireworks celebration, we have refrained from holding the event, and we will continue to manage these fireworks displays carefully and responsibly moving forward. That is no reason to ban them outright.

I am respectfully asking for your assistance in communicating the importance of this celebration throughout the confirmation process for the incoming Secretary of the Interior and in conversations with senior staff at the department. I ask that you encourage your colleagues on the Energy and Natural Resources committee to publicly question the secretary-elect's regulatory proposals for our national parks and expose the heavy-handed approach we expect to see. In addition, I ask that you make it a priority to meet with senior staff at the Department of the Interior to make the case for this event, lay out the economic importance to our state, and outline the steps we take to ensure the event can be held safely. Finally, in your communications on social media, on your website, and in the press, I ask you to educate your audiences on the benefits of this event and push back against unfounded criticisms or misconceptions about the event's safety.

The global pandemic hit the tourism industry harder than any other. This industry employs nearly 50,000 South Dakotans, and we must not hamper their recovery even further by prohibiting this event in the future.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your service to the people of South Dakota.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kristi Noem", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kristi Noem  
Governor