

November 17, 2020

Dear Honorable President-Elect Biden, Vice President-Elect Harris, and Members of the Presidential Transition Team:

We, the undersigned group of environmental, social justice, sustainable agriculture, labor, animal welfare, public health, family farmer, consumer advocacy, and anti-hunger organizations, are writing to respectfully urge you to withdraw Heidi Heitkamp from consideration for U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary.

Heitkamp is the wrong choice for the USDA because she has aligned herself with corporate agribusiness at the expense of family farmers, supports fossil fuel interests, and holds views that are out of step with the Democratic Party and the majority of Americans.

Heitkamp has accepted tens of thousands of dollars in campaign donations from giant agribusiness companies including Bayer-Monsanto, Archer Daniels Midland, Syngenta and Cargill.¹ She has raised \$633,000 from the fossil fuel industry— more than any other incumbent Senate Democrat during her two elections.² Heitkamp's history of receiving generous corporate donations coupled with her voting record is a strong indication that she would prioritize the interests of corporate agribusiness giants over the needs of family farmers.

During her Senate term, Heitkamp led legislation that exacerbated concentration in the agriculture sector, eased regulations on factory farms, and thwarted progress on combating climate change. She boasted about cutting \$4 billion from SNAP in 2014.³ In 2018, she helped lead negotiations on a Farm Bill that widened subsidy loopholes for wealthy mega-farms and exacerbated concentration in agriculture.⁴ She sponsored a Farm Bill amendment to expand industry check-off marketing programs and voted against an amendment to make the programs more transparent.⁵ Independent farmers and ranchers have widely criticized the check-off programs as unfairly benefiting the largest industrial agriculture companies.

Heitkamp's environmental record and support of the fossil fuel industry should disqualify her from leading an agency that is crucial to President-elect Biden's bold plan to fight climate change. Heitkamp cosponsored legislation to ease air quality regulations on factory farms and actively sought to weaken longstanding conservation measures on subsidized agricultural lands.⁶ She broke with the Democrats to support Trump's EPA nomination of Scott Pruitt and opposed GHG reduction measures widely supported by her party.⁷ She cosponsored legislation that would roll back environmental regulations and expand drilling on public lands.⁸ She supported the Keystone and Dakota Access gas pipelines, against the wishes of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in her state.⁹ These actions earned her the second lowest lifetime rating from the League of Conservation Voters among Democrats at the time she left office.¹⁰

After losing her Senate race, she used leftover campaign funds to start an organization that urges Democrats to move to the right on a range of issues, including climate change. The group is run out of a D.C. lobbying firm that works on behalf of Big Pharma, Big Ag, Big Tech, and the fossil fuel industry.¹¹

Tapping Heitkamp for this position in the Biden Administration would enable the continuation of disastrous Trump-era food and farm policies, jeopardize President-Elect Biden's climate goals, and boost corporate agribusiness at the expense of family farmers, frontline communities, the environment, hungry families, and animal welfare. Instead, we urge the administration to select one of the many other highly qualified candidates — including several women candidates and candidates of color — without ties to agribusiness and fossil fuels. We also urge you to refrain from nominating any agribusiness or fossil fuel industry lobbyists and senior executives or Members of Congress who have taken major campaign contributions from agribusiness or fossil fuel companies, PACs, or lobbyists.

We need a USDA Secretary that we can fully trust to deliver a healthy, just, and sustainable food system.

Thank you for your consideration,

350.org
350NH
50by40
A Well Fed World
Allamakee County Protectors - Education Campaign
Alliance for Natural Health USA
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
American Grassfed Association
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Animal Outlook
Animal Welfare Institute
Animal Wellness Action
Animal Wellness Foundation
Animals Are Sentient Beings, Inc.
Big Reuse
Biodynamic Association
Buffalo River Watershed Alliance
Call to Action CO
Catholic Network US
Celebrating Women's Leadership in Food + Red H Farm
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Environmental Health
Center for Food Safety
Center for Zero Waste Design
Central Maryland Beekeepers Association
CEO Pipe Organs/Golden Ponds Farm
Ceres Community Project
Church Women United in New York State
Citizens' Environmental Coalition
Climate Action Now, Western MA
Climate Hawks Vote
Climate Institute
Climate Justice Cornell
Collaborative Project Consulting
Community Action Works
Cornucopia Community Advocates
Cottonwood Environmental Law Center
CUESA
DCMJ.org
Demand Progress
Down to Earth Innovations
Earth Action, Inc.
Earth Guardians
Earth Guardians Bay Area Crew
Eastern Carolina Organics, LLC d/b/a Happy Dirt
EcoHealth Advocates
EcoHealth Network
Ecological Farming Association
Encompass
Endangered Habitats League
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Justice Ministry Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church
Factory Farming Awareness Coalition
Fair World Project
Family Farm Action
Farm Forward
Farm Sanctuary
Farm Transformation Institute
Farm Worker Ministry Northwest
Farmworker Association of Florida
Farmworker Justice
Farmworkers Support Committee
First Congregational Church of Oakland
Prophetic Public Witness
Food & Water Action
Food Chain Workers Alliance
Food Revolution Network

Food Shift
Fossil Free Tompkins
Friends of Family Farmers
Friends of Navdanya
Friends of the Earth
GC RESOLVE
Genesis Farm
GMO Free USA/Toxin Free USA
Good Insight Group
Green Lifestyles Network
Green State Solutions
GROW North Texas
Hampden Hampshire Conservation District, MA
HEAL (Health Environment Agriculture Labor)
Food Alliance
Health Care Without Harm
Heartwood
Highlander Research and Education Center
Humane Farming Association
Humane Society Legislative Fund
iEat Green
Institute for Policy Studies Climate Policy
Program
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
Jones River Watershed Association
LEAD for Pollinators, Inc.
Leadership Council for Justice and
Accountability
Lean and Green Kids
Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network
(LiKEN)
Lower East Side Ecology Center
Maryland Pesticide Education Network
Mercy For Animals
Mid-Missouri Peaceworks
Mobius
Moms Across America
National Employment Law Project
National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade
Association
NC Environmental Justice Network
New Mexico Hemp Co, LLC
New Roots, Inc.
Non Toxic Communities
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
Northeast Organic Farming Association-
Interstate Council
Northeast Pollinator Partnership
Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance
Nuclear Information and Resource Service
Occidental Arts & Ecology Center
Open Markets Institute
Organic & Natural Health Association
Organic Association of Kentucky
Organic Consumers Association
OrganicEye
People and Pollinators Action Network
People's Action
Pesticide Action Network
Pollinate Minnesota
Pollinator Friendly Yards
Poweshiek CARES
Progressive Change Campaign Committee
Qlatinx
Rachel Carson Council
Rapid Shift Network
Real Food Generation
Real Organic Project
Regeneration Massachusetts
Regenerative Organic Alliance
Revolving Door Project

Richman Law Group	The Greenbaum Foundation
RootsAction.org	The Humane League
Santa Cruz Climate Action Network	The Pollination Project
Sierra Harvest	Toxic Free North Carolina
Slow Food North Shore	Transformations CDC
Slow Food USA	Turning Green / Conscious Kitchen
Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden	UrbanBeeSF
Socially Responsible Agricultural Project	Utica Greens
Solar Wind Works	WATCH, Inc
Space2Place	WESPAC Foundation, Inc.
Sunflower Alliance	Women, Food and Agriculture Network
Sunrise Movement	World Animal Protection
Sustainable Agriculture Education	Xun Biosphere Project
The Center for a Humane Economy	Zero Foodprint
	Zero Hour

¹ United States Congress, Federal Election Commission, *Disbursements Heidi Heitkamp*, 2012-2018, https://www.fec.gov/data/disbursements/?data_type=processed&committee_id=C00042069&committee_id=C00067884&committee_id=C00093963&committee_id=C00232330&committee_id=C00281162&committee_id=C00363945&recipient_name=C00505552&recipient_name=C00629253&recipient_name=C00689273 (Accessed 10/30/2020)

² Center for Responsive Politics, OpenSecrets.org, *Sen. Hedi Heitkamp – North Dakota, Top Industries*, 2011-2020, <https://www.opensecrets.org/members-of-congress/industries?cid=N00033782&cycle=CAREER&type=I> (Accessed 10/30/2020)

³ Heidi Heitkamp, Speaking Live on the U.S Senate floor, Facebook, June 28, 2018, https://fb.watch/1HP1YaM_1W/

⁴ *Ag leaders back Heitkamp-Boozman Cuba Amendment in farm bill*, *The Fence Post*, September 6, 2018, <https://www.thefencepost.com/news/ag-leaders-back-heitkamp-boozman-cuba-amendment-in-farm-bill/> (Accessed 10/30/2020)

⁵ United States Senate, *Roll Call Vote 115th Congress - 2nd Session*, June 28, 2018, https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=115&session=2&vote=00142 (Accessed 10/30/2020)

⁶ Sara Wyant, *Sen. Heitkamp: Changes needed on conservation compliance, crop insurance*, *Agri-Pulse*, May 14, 2013, <https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/2845-sen-heitkamp-changes-needed-on-conservation-compliance-crop-insurance?iframe=1> (Accessed 11/10/2020)

⁷ *Senate Vote 71 - On the Nomination, ProPublica*, February 17, 2017, <https://projects.propublica.org/represent/votes/115/senate/1/71> (Accessed 10/30/2020)

⁸ United States Senate, *Roll Call Vote 114th Congress - 1st Session*, January 22, 2015, https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=114&session=1&vote=00017 (Accessed 10/30/2020)

⁹ United States Senate, *Roll Call Vote 114th Congress - 1st Session*, January 29, 2015, https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=114&session=1&vote=00049 (Accessed 10/30/2020)

¹⁰ *National Environmental Score Card – Senator Heidi Heitkamp*, *League of Conservation Voters*, 2019, <https://scorecard.lcv.org/moc/heidi-heitkamp> (Accessed 11/10/2020)

¹¹ Donald Shaw, *Group Claiming to Speak for Rural Democrats is Tied to Fossil Fuel Lobbyists*, *Sludge*, October 14, 2019, <https://readsludge.com/2019/10/14/group-claiming-to-speak-for-rural-democrats-is-tied-to-fossil-fuel-lobbyists/> (Accessed 10/30/2020)