Montana’s junior senator has [argued](https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/537615-daines-seeks-to-block-haaland-confirmation-to-interior) that confirming Representative Deb Haaland as Secretary of the Department of the Interior would be bad for Montanans’ “way of life” and hurt small business owners like me.

But as a long-time business executive, with experience building successful entrepreneurial companies in Western states, I am not concerned that the Congresswoman’s stated priority for protecting sensitive public areas from oil and gas development will harm our economy, or way of life. In fact, I have seen firsthand how our national parks, forests, monuments and other public lands, and policies that support them, actually drive economic growth.

The Biden Administration has laid out an ambitious plan to revitalize federal lands by blending conservation policies with a thoughtful energy deployment strategy that will allow energy companies to develop both fossil and renewable energy, but in a way that preserves these areas for current and future generations to enjoy. For this approach to be successful, it is critical that the President have at the Department of the Interior a visionary leader who understands how to strike this balance, and I believe in Representative Haaland, the President has appointed the right person to fill this role.

The United States, and specifically the Interior Department, is one of the world’s largest energy asset managers, controlling subsurface mineral rights on 700 million acres. Because of the amount of energy currently developed in these areas, more than 20 percent of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions result from federally owned lands. Despite this massive impact, Republican and Democratic Administrations alike have failed to seriously address emissions from these areas. With the nomination of Haaland, that will certainly change.

But it is also important to understand the economic value that will be derived directly as a result of the Biden’s Administration’s policies. When investors like myself analyze a venture opportunity, or fast-growing company executives are searching for a place to locate their next facility, the ability to recruit top-quality employees to help the company grow is central to the decision. Access to first-class outdoor recreational opportunities is extremely important to these target employees and so becomes a critical part of any decision-making process.

Protecting these areas from rampant oil and gas development in states like Montana will create new, high-quality jobs and economic opportunities. Rather than default to traditional talking points about regulations being bad for the economy, I hope the members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee will give Representative Haaland the opportunity to lay out her vision for this important role. I am confident that if they do, they will feel equally excited about the opportunities to address climate change and spur innovation across the country.

*Paul Smith is a Boulder-based venture capitalist and founding member of the Business Coalition for Conservation and Climate, a group of leading venture capitalists, investors and business executives who believe that sound conservation policy is key to economic growth.*