

With her qualifications, I can understand why Chairman GRASSLEY recommended her to the President for this nomination. What I cannot understand is why moneyed Washington interest groups are calling on Republican Senators to oppose the confirmation of any judicial nominee, regardless of a nominee's merit or qualifications. Judicial nominees like Judge Ebinger have worked hard to build admirable legal careers that have put them at the top of their profession. When judicial nominees submit themselves to the nominations process, they do so expecting and deserving to be considered by Senators exercising their own independent judgement.

Judicial nominees not only deserve our independent and considered judgement, it is our constitutional obligation as Senators to provide it. The duty to provide advice and consent on the President's nominees is our own and cannot be abdicated to Washington political action committees. This is especially true when such political action committees are advocating that we turn our backs on the American people by completely shutting down the judicial confirmation process.

Too many Americans who have sought justice in our Federal courts since last year have instead found delays and empty courtrooms because of Senate Republicans' obstruction on judicial nominees. Over the course of last year, Senate Republicans allowed confirmation votes on just 11 judicial nominees—and judicial vacancies soared across the country. When Senate Republicans took over the majority in January of last year, there were 43 judicial vacancies. Since then, vacancies have dramatically increased to 77—an increase of more than 75 percent. Furthermore, the number of judicial vacancies deemed to be "emergencies" by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts because caseloads in those courts are unmanageably high has nearly tripled under Republican Senate leadership—from 12 when Republicans took over last year to 32 today. Refusing to confirm any judicial nominees for the rest of this year would make the high number of vacancies in our Federal judiciary even worse.

In addition to the vote on Judge Ebinger's confirmation today, we have agreed to vote this week on another Iowa district court judge. When we return from the Presidents' Day recess, I hope Republicans will continue confirming judicial nominees with bipartisan support, as Democrats did when we held the majority. In 2008, when I was chairman of the committee with a Republican President, we worked to confirm judicial nominees as late as September of the Presidential election year. In fact, Senate Democrats helped confirm all 10 of President Bush's district court nominees pending on the Senate floor in a single day by unanimous consent on September 26, 2008. This was similarly true in 2004, when I

was ranking member of the committee with a Republican President, and we worked to confirm nominees as late as September of the Presidential election year.

There are 19 judicial nominees awaiting confirmation on the Senate floor. The next judicial nominee pending after we return from the President's Day recess will be Waverly Crenshaw, an exceptional African-American district court nominee from Tennessee who has the support of his Republican home State Senators, Senators ALEXANDER and CORKER. I hope the Senators from Tennessee will be able to convince their majority leader to schedule the Tennessee nominee's vote to occur this month. This is an emergency judicial vacancy in their State, so it is clear that this position is sorely needed for Tennesseans to receive swift justice in the middle district of Tennessee.

I urge my fellow Senators to vote to confirm Judge Ebinger and look forward to working with my fellow Senators to ensure timely confirmation of the other judicial nominees pending before the Senate.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I yield back time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, all time is yielded back.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Ebinger nomination?

Mr. GRASSLEY. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Missouri (Mr. BLUNT), the Senator from Arkansas (Mr. COTTON), the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), the Senator from Nevada (Mr. HELLER), the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN), the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO), the Senator from Nebraska (Mr. SASSE), the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS), the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY), the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. VITTER), and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. BOXER), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), the Senator from New Hampshire (Mrs. SHAHEEN), and the Senator from

Rhode Island (Mr. WHITEHOUSE) are necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 83, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 18 Ex.]

YEAS—83

Alexander	Feinstein	Moran
Ayotte	Fischer	Murkowski
Baldwin	Flake	Murphy
Barrasso	Franken	Murray
Bennet	Gardner	Nelson
Blumenthal	Gillibrand	Paul
Booker	Grassley	Perdue
Boozman	Hatch	Peters
Brown	Heinrich	Portman
Burr	Heitkamp	Reed
Cantwell	Hirono	Reid
Capito	Hoeben	Risch
Cardin	Inhofe	Roberts
Carper	Isakson	Rounds
Casey	Kaine	Schatz
Cassidy	King	Schumer
Coats	Kirk	Scott
Cochran	Klobuchar	Sessions
Collins	Lankford	Shelby
Coons	Leahy	Stabenow
Corker	Lee	Sullivan
Cornyn	Manchin	Tester
Crapo	Markey	Thune
Daines	McCaskill	Udall
Donnelly	McConnell	Warner
Durbin	Menendez	Warren
Enzi	Merkley	Wyden
Ernst	Mikulski	

NOT VOTING—17

Blunt	Johnson	Tillis
Boxer	McCain	Toomey
Cotton	Rubio	Vitter
Cruz	Sanders	Whitehouse
Graham	Sasse	Wicker
Heller	Shaheen	

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume legislative session.

The majority leader is recognized.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Minnesota.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUESTS—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise today for the fifth time to ask unanimous consent for a vote for the Ambassadors to Norway and Sweden. Senator CRUZ has been objecting to this. I appreciate the bipartisan support for these nominees. They made it through the committees without any objections.

These are the 11th and 12th biggest investors in the United States of America. They are our allies. They are our allies in our fight against Russian aggression. Norway shares a border with Russia. Yet every major European

country has an ambassador except Norway and Sweden.

I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the nomination of Samuel D. Heins, Calendar No. 263; that the Senate proceed to vote without intervening action or debate on the nomination; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). Is there objection?

The majority leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on behalf of the junior Senator from Texas, Mr. CRUZ, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination that is to the country of Sweden: Azita Raji, Calendar No. 148; that the Senate proceed to vote without intervening action or debate on the nomination; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The majority leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on behalf of the junior Senator from Texas, Mr. CRUZ, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, as I said, this has been a bipartisan effort to get these two nominees confirmed. There is no one holding up the vote on these nominations except for Senator CRUZ. We asked him to remove these holds. He has not voiced any concerns about these individual nominees. He has voiced concerns about unrelated foreign policy issues. There have been other holds in the past, but everyone has lifted their hold. I note that even Senator COTTON from Arkansas has said that there are no issues with the qualifications of these nominees and that these nominees should proceed to a vote.

As I said, this is the fifth time I have come to the floor. I have also been joined by Senator CARDIN, Senator SHAHEEN, and Senator FRANKEN. This is something that has to get done.

Listen to these numbers: Sam Heins has been waiting for 293 days to be confirmed as the U.S. ambassador to Norway. Azita Raji has been waiting 474 days to be confirmed as the first female U.S. Ambassador to Sweden. Both of these nominees were voted out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee without controversy and with significant bipartisan support. Not a single Senator has questioned the qualifications of Sam Heins or Azita Raji. That is because they are both qualified to take these jobs.

We have an ambassador in France. We have an ambassador in England. We

have an ambassador in Italy. We have an ambassador in Germany. We have an ambassador to nearly every European nation but not these two Scandinavian countries.

More than 1,200 refugees seek asylum in Sweden every single day. I cannot tell my colleagues how many times I have heard people on both sides of the aisle talk about how during this refugee crisis we need a strong and unified Europe, and we need to be their allies, and they need to be our allies. While we may have disagreements on how to solve all of the refugee crises, we have to at least give support to our allies who are taking in these refugees.

Sweden accepts more refugees per capita than any other country in the European Union. Norway expects to take in as many as 25,000 refugees this year. It has already provided more than \$6 million to Greece to help respond to the influx of refugees seeking a way to enter Europe. All of us on both sides of the aisle have talked about this. Yet, right now, no Ambassadors are in those two critical countries.

I would note they have Ambassadors from China in those countries. They have Ambassadors from Russia. They have Ambassadors. So the people of their countries who love the United States, who respect the United States, who travel to the United States, they want to know: How come every major nation has an ambassador to our country but not the United States of America?

We also understand the important economic contributions Sweden and Norway make to our country. These diplomatic relations are 200 years old. That is why we have widespread support for these nominees. Yet one Senator—how can one Senator stand in the way of a vote affecting relations that are 200 years old?

Our economic partnership with these countries is enormous. Sweden supports over 330,700 American jobs across 50 States. In the case of Norway, our trade partnership is \$16 billion—\$7 billion in exports, \$9 billion in imports. Leaving these countries without a U.S. Ambassador is a slap in the face to their governments, their people, and all of the American workers who are supported by Swedish and Norwegian investment in the United States. That is happening today.

In addition to Sam Heins and Azita Raji, there are other nominees who are vital in our fight against terrorism; however, I am going to focus today on these two nominees.

We have two countries, Norway and Sweden, that are members of NATO, that have joined us in the fight against Islamic extremists, that have joined us in the fight against ISIS. This is no way to treat them.

I would also add, in kind of a combination of our national security interests and economic interests, that Norway has now signed to purchase 252 fighter planes—22 just recently—from

Lockheed Martin. Those fighter planes are made in America. The country of Norway could have decided to buy those fighter planes from any nation in the world. They could have bought those fighter planes from Europe. Where did they buy those fighter planes from? They brought them from the United States, from Lockheed Martin, and that company is located in Texas. Those fighter planes are made in Fort Worth, TX, Senator CRUZ's home State.

So what do we say to Norway when they invest? We can do the math—nearly \$200 million a plane, 22 planes. So they have strong national security, as we see Russian aggression and Islamic extremism and as they join with us in fights across the world. What do we say? You are not worthy of an ambassador. Because one Senator—the Senator from the State where those fighter planes are made, from Fort Worth, TX—has decided to hold this up.

What are we doing when we say to a major company in the United States that got a major deal with a foreign government that that government is not worthy of having an ambassador? What kind of encouragement do we give when we don't even let them have an ambassador?

This is one of many examples of what is going on and why the people are so angry. We have heard from the Foreign Minister. We have seen comments from people of Norwegian descent and Swedish descent who do not understand how this could be going on right now, given everything Europe is confronting.

It is my hope that we will be able to work these things out. We have been given various reasons from letters that have been written, to streets in front of embassies, for this hold. But we are hopeful that somehow we are going to be able to work this out. This is because of one Senator who is not even here in this Chamber day after day after day when I return to put these names in for Ambassador.

We are not stopping. Senator SHAHEEN and I are going to come to this floor every single day and make the case for these countries. I am hopeful we will be able to resolve this.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to enter into a colloquy with the junior Senator from Montana for 20 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER THE LAW

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about a very important issue for our Nation's judicial system and two bills that I and my colleague from Montana have introduced. The bills' primary focus is what all of us in the Senate want, and that is equal justice under the law.