

## EXECUTIVE SESSION

## EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 32, Alexander Acosta to be Secretary of Labor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of R. Alexander Acosta, of Florida, to be Secretary of Labor.

## CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

## CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of R. Alexander Acosta, of Florida, to be Secretary of Labor.

John Barrasso, Susan M. Collins, Ron Johnson, Deb Fischer, Luther Strange, Bill Cassidy, Lindsey Graham, John Boozman, Mike Rounds, David Perdue, Lamar Alexander, Tom Cotton, Orrin G. Hatch, Todd Young, Mitch McConnell, Joni Ernst, Dan Sullivan.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call with respect to the cloture motion be waived.

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

## EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume consideration of the Perdue nomination, as under the previous order.

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

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

## REMEMBERING TRISH VRADENBURG

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the wonderful life and extraordinary work of Trish Vradenburg. It is with a heavy heart that I note the passing of my dear friend and esteemed ally in our national effort to defeat Alzheimer's disease.

Many of our colleagues in this Chamber not only counted Trish as a friend

but also greatly respected her as a champion in the war against an international enemy—Alzheimer's disease. It is through our work shedding light on this horrific disease, creating a roadmap for a cure and strategies for prevention, that Trish and I developed an enduring friendship. She and I shared the experience of having our beloved mothers claimed by this cruel and merciless illness. We knew the ravages of Alzheimer's on our loved ones firsthand and vowed that other people should not have to experience such suffering.

The impact of her mother's illness motivated Trish and her cherished husband George to dedicate much of the past two decades to fighting Alzheimer's disease. Together they raised funds, founded and led the innovative UsAgainstAlzheimer's organization, committing their time, energy, personal resources, and passion to bring Alzheimer's disease out of the shadows and to advocate for the policies and research needed to stop this disease and prevent it from occurring in the future.

Trish was a multidimensional force of nature. Creative, caring, and compassionate, she was a devoted daughter and caregiver to her mother. She was a loving mother to her two children, Alissa and Tyler, their spouses, and four grandchildren. And, as so many of us here know, she was completely dedicated to her husband George, a man of enormous talent and business acumen.

My wife Susan and I have been privileged to call Trish and George treasured friends for more than 20 years. To say that George and Trish were ideal partners does not fully capture their love story. They were soulmates, complementing each other perfectly and creating a powerful, enchanting, and dynamic duet. Many of us have tales of our interactions with Trish and George, witnessing firsthand Trish's indefatigable spirit, perseverance, and leadership. Simply put, you never wanted to tell Trish "maybe" or "no," particularly when the issue was Alzheimer's disease.

This was compounded by the fact that Trish was a master communicator and humorist. She did not mince words and knew how to convey a message, often delivered with memorable one-liners. A gifted writer, she authored novels, sitcoms, and op-eds, with many of her recent pieces calling attention to the great threat of Alzheimer's disease. I had the honor of playing the role of her mother's doctor on stage in Trish's award-winning play, "Surviving Grace," which shines a spotlight on Alzheimer's impact not only on the patient but on their family members as well.

It was right here in the Senate that Trish began her professional career as a speechwriter to Senator Harrison Williams of her home State of New Jersey. Therefore, it is particularly fitting that the Senate pause to recognize this remarkable woman and her many accomplishments across so many fields.

In closing, it is difficult for me to comprehend that Trish has passed away and that we will no longer hear her powerful voice, her luminous laughter, her one-liners, experience her creativity, and benefit from her passionate conviction that we must keep fighting to defeat Alzheimer's. The indomitable memory of Trish Vradenburg—an amazing, creative, and pioneering woman—motivates us all to live to the fullest and to accelerate our work so that we can soon reach the day when Alzheimer's disease is found only in the history books. In these ways, her inspirational legacy lives on as George continues their important work with Trish in his heart, in her family's love, and in her friends' and colleagues' admiration.

This was a great woman whom we have just lost, a champion for finding a cure for Alzheimer's disease, and I am so honored to be able to speak in the U.S. Senate to tell the Nation of the work of this great woman.

With that, I yield back the remainder of my time.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. TESTER. 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. TESTER. Mr. President, I rise to support the nomination of Gov. Sonny Perdue for Secretary of the Department of Agriculture.

As the only active farmer in the U.S. Senate, I have high expectations of the next Ag Secretary. Over the past 2 weeks, like millions of other farmers across this country, I have been on my farm and out in the fields, planting peas and wheat and safflower. When you are on the tractor day in and day out, from sunrise to sunset, you have a lot of time to think, and over these past 2 weeks, I have been thinking a lot about the important role Mr. Perdue will play in strengthening rural America.

A lot has changed in the 100 years since my grandparents homesteaded our farm. New technology and improved equipment has made us more efficient producers, but a consolidation in the marketplace has taken its toll on rural communities. The shrinking number of family farms has depopulated rural communities like the one I grew up in.

Today, a combination of consolidation and low commodity prices is taking its toll on family farmers and ranchers. Commodity prices are low across the board. In fact, in some cases, markets are below the cost of production. At the same time, we have seen rising input costs. The price of fertilizer and seed is increasing at the same time that we have seen prices decrease. To make matters worse, the big

guys use tough times like this to sweep up the family farms and ranches and add to their bottom lines at the expense of hardworking folks who are trying to keep their operations in the family.

The next Ag Secretary needs to work with Senators from rural States like Montana to identify ways to reverse this trend of consolidation because when a family farm goes under, the ripple is felt across the community as schools lose funding, and the local grocery stores and hardware stores lose customers.

Yet this is not the first time rural America has stood nose to nose with adversity. We had adversity in the dirty thirties, and we fought through the high interest rates of the 1970s. I know folks in rural America will overcome adversity once again, but in order to do so, we need an Ag Secretary who will ensure that we are supporting rural communities, not pulling the rug out from underneath them. This means pushing back against the draconian budget cuts that have been put forward by this administration.

The proposed budget slashes 21 percent from the USDA. That is nearly \$5 billion. These budget cuts undermine important resources in rural America across this country and in Montana.

The proposed budget also guts the Farm Service Agency—a one-stop shop where farmers and ranchers sign up for critical ag initiatives. If cuts are made to the Farm Service Agency, farmers and ranchers will likely be forced to travel greater distances to get the assistance they rely on to create jobs in communities like Havre and that they rely on to put food on the tables of this country.

The proposed budget also eliminates the rural Water & Wastewater Loan & Grant Program. When communities cannot access the resources they need to update critical water and watershed infrastructure, rural families suffer. Quite frankly, the White House's budget will be a nail in the coffin for rural America.

The USDA budget needs to reflect the needs of rural communities. That means increasing resources for farmers and ranchers and improving access to high-speed broadband for schools, businesses, and families. It also means boosting overhead support and loans for mom-and-pop businesses. The next Ag Secretary needs to fight for a USDA budget that works for rural families. Once Mr. Perdue is confirmed, I urge him to take the initiative and fight against these damaging cuts that will hurt rural America.

In addition to the USDA budget, we are a year away from the expiration of the farm bill. Over the past 6 months, I have traveled across Montana and have met with folks to discuss their priorities for the next farm bill. With wheat prices at a decade low and with ranchers experiencing an incredible plunge in cattle prices, it is critical that we construct a farm bill that

works for family farms and ranches. I do not believe the next farm bill will solve all of the challenges we are facing today, but it should give certainty to farmers and ranchers who could be a bad storm or a cold winter away from losing their livelihoods.

Once Mr. Perdue is confirmed, I will be asking him to take an active role in this debate to ensure that the next farm bill meets the needs of family farmers and ranchers. I urge Mr. Perdue to help me educate folks in this body and in the White House that the safety net is more than a talking point.

Preserving the safety net in the next farm bill will ensure that a bad year does not wipe out family farms and ranches across this country. Families in rural America want a fair opportunity to succeed, and the farm bill should be a tool that works for small-scale producers, not just for the big guys.

Finally, I urge Mr. Perdue to work hand in hand with us westerners to make sure we are responsibly managing our forests. Breaking through the management gridlock in our national forests will reduce fire risks and will put folks back to work.

I have been a long supporter of collaborative efforts to increase active forest management, improve recreation opportunities on our public lands, and preserve these special places for future generations. Republicans and Democrats have worked together to propose important reforms that end fire-borrowing and fund our response to forest fires like we fund other natural disasters. These are the kinds of solutions we need to increase active forest management and put folks back to work in the woods, and I look forward to the next Ag Secretary joining our efforts.

The USDA has a lot on its plate, and rightfully so. There are major issues facing our farmers and ranchers in rural communities and national forests, and it is time to tackle these issues head-on. I think Governor Perdue is a standup man. I appreciate our open and honest conversations about the need to work together to strengthen rural America, and I am more than willing to give him a fair shake, but I will be honest. These problems are too great to ignore through the honeymoon period. I expect Governor Perdue to hit the ground running so we can invest in rural families, improve opportunities for farmers and ranchers, and break through the gridlock that plagues our national forests.

I look forward to tackling these issues with Mr. Perdue, and I encourage my colleagues to give Mr. Perdue the same fair shake.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

MR. ISAKSON. Mr. President, first of all, I have a rare opportunity to follow JON TESTER, who is a great farmer from Montana, a great ranking member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and a man who knows agriculture well.

I grew up picking up pecans off the ground on my grandfather's farm. I know a little about it. I know the salt-of-the-earth people who grow our food and our fiber who make our country work. I doubt if many people have had the opportunity to be a U.S. Senator, but I know this; that very few have had the opportunity to be a U.S. Senator and serve with the cousin of an ag commissioner, because the Presiding Officer who is presiding over this vote is the cousin of Sonny Perdue, the man we are going to confirm as Secretary of Agriculture under Donald Trump's administration. I am pleased to be the senior Senator from Georgia to brag about all of the Perdues whom I know in my State and all they have contributed to our State and how important Sonny Perdue is going to be to us as the Secretary of Agriculture.

If one looked in Webster's Dictionary—and if it were a picture dictionary and every word were described not by words but by a picture—if one looked up “Ag Secretary,” you would see Sonny Perdue's picture.

Think about this for a second. He grew up on a row crop farm in Bonaire, GA, which is an ag community in our State. He was in the fertilizer business and the grain business. He was a partner in a storage and shipping business with his cousin, the junior Senator from Georgia, DAVID PERDUE. He graduated with a doctorate degree in veterinary medicine from the University of Georgia—one of the preeminent veterinary medicine schools in the country. He presided as Governor of the State of Georgia after he was speaker pro tempore of the senate of the State of Georgia. He was the president pro tempore in the senate when he was a Democrat. He was the Governor when he was a Republican. He did not switch parties for any reason except that he wanted to do right, and when one party went in the wrong direction, he took the party in the next direction and took them to lead our State to bigger and higher heights. He presided over a State that has 42,000 farmers and a \$75 billion farm gate product. Georgia is agriculture and knows agriculture.

I served in the legislature with him in the State senate. I served under him when he was our Governor. I served with him as the Governor when I was in the U.S. House, and later in the U.S. Senate. We worked on agriculture business and port business. We worked on the Port of Savannah. We worked on everything that was in the interests of Georgia. Sonny Perdue knows that there is one way to do a job, and that is the best way he knows how: Do it right the first time, and you never have to apologize.

President Trump has made a great decision for our State. He has made a great decision for our country. He has picked the finest person you could find available in the United States to be the Secretary of Agriculture for the United States of America.

He graduated from the University of Georgia, was in the farm business himself, served as a Governor, served as the speaker pro tempore, and married the prettiest woman in Georgia—and I will get in trouble for classifying her that way, but it happens to be the truth, and I never lie on the floor of the Senate.

I am going to be proud tonight when I cast my vote for Sonny Perdue as Secretary of Agriculture, along with the Presiding Officer and everybody else. I commend our President on a great selection, I congratulate our State on a great favorite son, and I commend the Senate Committee on Agriculture for the nomination of a great Agriculture Secretary, as well as Senator ROBERTS.

I commend my brother and my friend, my fellow Georgian, Sonny Perdue, to the Senate today, and I urge all of my colleagues to vote in favor of his nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I wish to thank my dear friend, my colleague from Georgia, for making such an outstanding statement in his own inimitable fashion—sort of a Paul Harvey of the Senate, if you will—and I know that he would never lie on the Senate floor. He might stretch the truth a little, but just a bit. I thank him so much for his testimony on behalf of our next Secretary of Agriculture.

The Senate will soon vote on the confirmation of Governor Sonny Perdue, the President's nominee for U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

The Department of Agriculture is made up of 29 agencies and offices, and it employs nearly 100,000 men and women who work in all 50 States and around the globe. The Department provides leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, scientific research, and related issues that impact every American every day.

Throughout our Nation's history, our farmers and ranchers and business owners in rural America have survived drought and disease and floods and tornadoes and whatever else Mother Nature throws at them. We just had a big prairie fire in Kansas. Yet, year after year, they produce the safest, most abundant and affordable food and fiber supply in the world.

Today, however, our producers from across the country are facing tough economic times, with multiple years of low prices. These same producers now need a strong market for whatever they produce. During this critical time, the importance of trade for the agriculture industry cannot be overstated. We have to understand within the administration, within this Senate, and with our colleagues in the House, that, yes, it is important to export things that we make, but it is also equally important to export things that we grow.

On top of all of this, our farmers and ranchers and rural businesses have

been burdened by regulations from agencies across the Federal Government. I have heard time and again, as has my distinguished colleague who is the Presiding Officer, that the costly and hard-to-understand regulations have and are endangering the ability of our producers to even stay in business.

Members of the Agriculture Committee have a lot of work to do over the next 2 years, including regulatory reform and recommending to our new Secretary what he can do in that regard but also the reauthorization of the farm bill. We intend to do that work in the bipartisan fashion that has served us so well in the past. I will make the statement—I have the privilege of being chairman of the Agriculture Committee—that we are the least partisan committee in the Senate, and today that means a lot. It also means we work well with our distinguished ranking member, Senator DEBORAH STABENOW from Michigan.

But, now, more than ever, agriculture needs a voice, an advocate, and a champion at the highest levels of government, and Governor Perdue has been nominated to serve in exactly that role.

As has been said, he is from Georgia. He was raised on a farm and practiced as a veterinarian before returning to his home county to work in the grain business. He was elected to serve in local and State government, including two terms as the distinguished Governor of the State of Georgia.

During his confirmation hearing—and I want to underscore that his confirmation hearing was unique in the Senate in that there were no attacks on the nominee—Governor Perdue knew the answers to the questions that he was going to be asked. He didn't have to be briefed. The Governor demonstrated a real understanding of the challenges that now face the agriculture industry and the willingness to work together to find solutions.

The Agriculture Committee received many letters in support of his nomination, including support from six former U.S. Secretaries of Agriculture, representing both Republican and Democratic Presidents, and another from nearly 700 organizations across the agriculture and food value chain.

Last month, the Agriculture Committee voted by voice vote to report Governor Perdue's nomination to the full Senate—a voice vote.

Our farmers and ranchers have been long waiting for this important role to be filled. Once Governor Perdue becomes Secretary Perdue, I know he will put the needs of farmers, ranchers, and others in rural America first, and lead us in both the House and Senate to implement a productive trade policy and economic recovery in rural and smalltown America.

So I urge my colleagues to join in bipartisan support for Sonny Perdue's confirmation as Agriculture Secretary and for being the champion for farmers and ranchers and growers and consumers.

I yield the floor.

Mr. President, after a careful counting of the Members present on the floor, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Under the previous order, the question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Perdue nomination?

Mr. ISAKSON. 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. PERDUE (when his name was called). Present.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 87, nays 11, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 112 Ex.]

#### YEAS—87

Alexander	Feinstein	Murkowski
Baldwin	Fischer	Murphy
Barrasso	Franken	Murray
Bennet	Gardner	Nelson
Blunt	Graham	Paul
Boozman	Grassley	Peters
Brown	Hassan	Portman
Burr	Hatch	Risch
Cantwell	Heinrich	Roberts
Capito	Heitkamp	Rounds
Cardin	Heller	Rubio
Carper	Hirono	Sasse
Casey	Hoeben	Schatz
Cassidy	Inhofe	Schumer
Cochran	Isakson	Scott
Collins	Johnson	Shaheen
Coons	Kaine	Shelby
Corker	Kennedy	Stabenow
Cornyn	King	Strange
Cortez Masto	Klobuchar	Sullivan
Cotton	Lankford	Tester
Crapo	Leahy	Thune
Cruz	Lee	Tillis
Daines	Manchin	Toomey
Donnelly	McCain	Udall
Duckworth	McCaskill	Van Hollen
Durbin	McConnell	Warner
Enzi	Merkley	Wicker
Ernst	Moran	Young

#### NAYS—11

Blumenthal	Markey	Warren
Booker	Menendez	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Reed	Wyden
Harris	Sanders	

#### ANSWERED "PRESENT"—1

Perdue

#### NOT VOTING—1

Flake

The nomination was confirmed.

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

#### CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the