

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I have nine unanimous consent requests for committees to meet during today's session of the Senate. I ask unanimous consent that these requests be agreed to en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. SCHUMER. I object, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. SCHUMER. 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. BROWN. 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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. BROWN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for up to 5 minutes.

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

NOMINATIONS OF STEVEN MNUCHIN AND TOM PRICE

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I rise to discuss what happened in the Finance Committee today—or what didn't happen in the Finance Committee today. Two newspapers—one, the Columbus Dispatch, one of Ohio's best and most conservative newspapers, and the Wall Street Journal, one of this country's most conservative newspapers—reported that the two nominees in front of the Senate Finance Committee had lied to the committee. Treasury Secretary-Designee Mnuchin had lied when asked if his bank, OneWest, had done robo signings; he said no.

The Columbus Dispatch investigative reporters found, in fact, that they had done robo signings, and they found that dozens—probably hundreds, maybe thousands—of Ohioans lost their homes. A woman named Miss Duncan, who had paid her mortgage month after month, was doing everything right. She was foreclosed on—not anything of her doing—and her financial life was turned upside down.

The Wall Street Journal reported that Congressman PRICE, the designee for Health and Human Services, had lied about insider information he had. He had advantages that other investors didn't have in buying health care stocks as he sat on the health care committee in the House, as he voted, as he wrote amendments and bills dealing with health care.

These are nominees for agencies—the two most important economic agencies in the Federal Government, probably, at least in the Cabinet—who have lied about things that affect people's lives. It is hundreds of people—thousands,

maybe, in my State. We are not even the largest State on foreclosures caused by OneWest. Thousands, hundreds of thousands—who knows how many around the country, as he will not tell us yet—have lost homes because of his and his bank's actions, making him wealthier, to be sure, but upending people's lives in the cruellest kind of way when their homes are foreclosed on.

We are saying to Senator HATCH, the chairman of the Finance Committee: Get some answers here. Find out why these two nominees lied, and find out what they are going to do to fix it. Find out what they have in their backgrounds that they haven't disclosed to this committee.

We have no business voting on nominees before we have that kind of information. That is the reason that Democratic Senators of the Finance Committee, led by Ranking Member WYDEN, decided not to come to the committee to vote today—because it is the only way we can get Senator HATCH to bring those two forward to give us the information and to give the American public the information they need.

I might add that we probably did President Trump a favor today, because if these two nominees had been brought forward—and I assume confirmed, because Republicans are voting for every nominee, it seems, no matter what; I haven't seen a break from that yet—they may have come to the floor and have been confirmed, and there likely would have been a scandal early in the Trump Administration and in the Treasury Department and Health and Human Services Department—two incredibly important agencies.

I think that we, perhaps, in some sense, saved President Trump from himself and the damage that his nominees could do. I don't expect appreciation or thanks from the White House on this, but I do think this is an issue that should be taken care of before they head two of the most important and largest—if not largest, two of the most important—Federal agencies.

I yield back my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise to discuss why I intend to oppose the nomination of Rex Tillerson as the Secretary of State. This is not a decision that I make lightly. I have no doubt that Mr. Tillerson has been a successful businessman, managing one of America's largest corporations at ExxonMobil. Many have attested to his being a man of character who has given back to his community and, particularly, through his work with the Boy Scouts of America.

I have no reason to doubt that he does have the character and decency that we would applaud in any person. However, when the United States faces some of the most complex global challenges in a generation, this is not the time to appoint as our Nation's top diplomat someone who has no dem-

onstrated experience articulating and advocating for America's interests, values, and commitment to our allies and partners.

As the events of this past week make clear, we need a Secretary of State who will speak up and candidly tell the truth to the President when he acts contrary to who we are as a nation and harms our relations with our partners and our standing in the world. Without an effective voice at the State Department for America's best interests, both within the executive branch and outside our borders, we will continue to see this administration, I fear, take steps that undermine cooperation with our closest allies and neighbors, violate our values, and ultimately make our troops and citizens less safe. I am concerned that Mr. Tillerson will not be such a voice for the American people.

Throughout the confirmation process, Mr. Tillerson has repeatedly demonstrated either his lack of preparation or his unwillingness, perhaps, to specifically declare himself on key issues. In particular, I am concerned about his views on Russia, climate change, and immigration, and how he will influence a White House that already seems determined to pursue campaign promises regardless of the impact on American foreign policy.

On Russia, Mr. Tillerson has demonstrated a familiarity with Putin and the Russian Government that is deeply concerning. Mr. Tillerson has spent his professional life advancing the interests of ExxonMobil—indeed, almost to the exclusivity of any other purpose. That is of concern, and should be of concern to all of us.

Even as the United States was re-evaluating its relationship with Russia in recent years, Mr. Tillerson has deepened his personal relationship with Putin, to the point that the Russian President awarded Mr. Tillerson the Russian Order of Friendship in 2013, supposedly a very high honor for a non-Russian. It appears that Mr. Tillerson opposed U.S. sanctions against Russia after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 because his multinational corporation stood to lose very lucrative oil contracts if sanctions were put in place.

International sanctions against Russia, imposed by the United States and the European Union, have sent a clear and effective message to Russia that their invasion of Ukraine is unacceptable. These sanctions are absolutely critical to multilateral efforts to hold Russia to its commitments to end the violence in Ukraine and restore its sovereignty, consistent with the Minsk agreements. The Russians claimed that these are separatists, that these are Ukrainians rising up, but the truth is that this is Russian-inspired, Russian-directed, and at the behest of Putin.

Mr. Tillerson's wavering on Russian sanctions, however, could weaken the resolve of our European allies in maintaining these sanctions. It could encourage Putin in his efforts to cut a

deal for sanctions relief and cause our allies in the Baltics and elsewhere to question the U.S. and NATO commitment to their security. This ultimately will make us less safe.

On climate change, Mr. Tillerson's career up to this point has been marked by a disregard for the environment. Strong environmental policies, including coordinating global efforts to address climate change, are in the best interest of the American people and help fulfill our moral responsibility as stewards of the Earth for the next generation. That is why I have consistently supported limits on oil and gas exploration, bans on drilling in pristine areas, eliminating oil and gas tax subsidies and giveaways, increases in research into new sustainable energy technologies, and the negotiation of international climate treaties. Mr. Tillerson's time at ExxonMobil stands in stark contrast to these policy goals and makes me doubt whether, if approved, he would effectively protect our environment and work with our partners around the world to uphold our commitments as Secretary of State.

On immigration, I am concerned about whether Mr. Tillerson can be an effective advocate for policies that keep the American people safe while preserving our ties with key partners and upholding our values internationally.

President Trump's Executive order blocking immigrants from certain Muslim-majority nations is, in my view, unconstitutional, un-American, cruel to those fleeing danger and injustice, and ultimately makes us less secure. It ignores the horrific circumstances refugees are fleeing in numerous war-torn regions. It suggests the insertion of arbitrary religious and ethnic considerations and fails to account for the strict vetting procedures already in place for refugees, particularly from Syria and areas of conflict. It is also contrary to our history as a nation that, from its birth, has benefited from the contributions of hard-working and successful immigrants.

In particular, this Executive order is a betrayal of our commitment to those who risk their lives to serve as translators for our troops fighting in Iraq. Through the Special Immigrant Visa Program, we promised these brave Iraqis the opportunity to resettle in the United States in recognition of their invaluable contributions to our wartime missions. Yet this administration has effectively blocked these SIV Program recipients without a second thought.

In addition, the President's actions on immigration are making America less safe by undermining key relationships with allies and partners. The President's Executive order on immigration hands ISIS a self-inflicted propaganda victory that reinforces their claim that the United States is at war with all of Islam. It damages our diplomatic relationships with Muslim-

majority nations, whether on the list or not, by undermining their willingness and ability to cooperate with U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies in sharing information on potential terrorist attackers. It may also compel these countries to reciprocate by prohibiting Americans from entering their borders.

Just this morning in the Armed Services Committee, we heard from an eminent expert. She indicated to us that the Iraqi Parliament has already had a meeting and has essentially resolved to reciprocate by banning Americans from Iraq.

We have examples today of Iraqi pilots training in the United States so that they can go back and work with our military personnel to attack ISIS. Had their training been scheduled—

Mrs. McCASKILL. Mr. President, will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. REED. Yes, I will.

Mrs. McCASKILL. It is my understanding that not only are we fighting shoulder to shoulder with Iraqis against ISIL, on the day these orders were signed, we had Iraqi pilots in the United States of America training to bomb ISIS. If they had come days after the signing of this order instead of days before, they would not have been allowed to enter the country for this important training; is that correct?

Mr. REED. The Senator from Missouri is absolutely correct. That is the point I was going to make, and she made it more distinctly and more decisively.

Mrs. McCASKILL. Sorry. I heard you talking about Iraqis, and I wanted to make sure everyone in America understood that they were here training with our military to fight ISIS, and the President of the United States told them they were no longer welcome.

Mr. REED. This is something that has been ongoing for many years. I can recall visiting a training facility in Rhode Island—formerly Quonset Point Naval Air Station; now it is a National Guard station—where they were training Iraqi Air Force pilots to fly C-130J aircraft. Again, had this order been in effect, those pilots would not have been allowed in for the training that not only helps them but helps the thousands of American military personnel in Iraq, shoulder to shoulder, fighting together, depending on not just the presence but the confidence of the Iraqi military in the United States and that reciprocal mutual relationship. This measure sends a terrible signal to them saying: Go ahead and fight, but you won't get to the United States.

It is particularly the case I make with respect to these people who feel threatened because they helped us. We have a special visa program, but right now that is in limbo because we essentially said they can't come in, even though they risked their lives to protect our interests and the interests of their own country.

We are creating huge problems, and again, I haven't heard the nominee

speak out decisively and clearly about the problems this policy is engendering, and that is incumbent upon the individual.

We have traditionally granted nominees broad deference out of respect for the President, and I don't think this is an issue of simply stopping a nominee for the sake of stopping a nominee. But we are not a rubberstamp either. We have to come here and make the case. When we see examples of behaviors that demonstrably threaten the security of the United States, our ability to cooperate with others, our image in the world, and we are not confident that our Secretary of State will not only reject those but effectively argue within and without that we have a higher purpose, a better goal, a better policy, then it is our obligation to stand and to render a vote of no, and I intend to do that.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

TRAVEL BAN

Mrs. McCASKILL. Mr. President, I am going to make a couple of brief comments and then yield my hour of postclosure debate.

Let me just say that nothing the President did made us safer. And one of the most outrageous claims the President made was that we don't have extreme vetting.

The Presiding Officer and I both serve on the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, and after we realized that we needed to take a closer look at refugees and making sure bad guys weren't getting into this country, we instituted an amazing array of vetting processes.

Let me first start with this important principle. Nobody applies to the United States for refugee status; they apply to the United Nations. Less than 1 percent of the people who apply for refugee status with the United Nations are granted the opportunity to go forward. So we start out with 99-plus percent of the people who apply to be a refugee turned down at the United Nations, so the less than 1 percent who come to us, come to us for another aggressive screening process. I went to Jordan and watched it. There are multiple interviews. It takes 18 months to 2 years. They are vetted through every possible intelligence agency, every possible database. And by the way, we check what they are saying even if they don't have papers. There are iris scans. It is the most extreme vet you can imagine. Of course, because it was so extreme, we realized that the hole in our system was not the refugees; it was, in fact, the Visa Waiver Program, which is why we passed a law after Paris to make sure that anybody who was in certain countries had to get a visa. Obama didn't do a travel ban. Obama never identified countries for a travel ban. All President Obama did was say: If you have been in these countries, you have to have a visa so we have information on you.