

## EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following nomination: Executive Calendar No. 362.

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

The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of David J. Redl, of New York, to be Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nomination be printed in the RECORD.

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

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

The nomination was confirmed.

## LEGISLATIVE SESSION

## MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for 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.

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

## VOTE EXPLANATION

• Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I was unavailable for rollcall vote No. 262, on the nomination of John H. Gibson, of Texas, to be Deputy Chief Management Officer of the Department of Defense. Had I been present, I would have voted yea.

Mr. President, I was unavailable for rollcall vote No. 263, on the motion to invoke cloture on Steven Andrew Engel, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Attorney General. Had I been present, I would have voted nay.

Mr. President, I was unavailable for rollcall vote No. 264, on the nomination of Steven Andrew Engel, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Attorney General. Had I been present, I would have voted nay.

Mr. President, I was unavailable for rollcall vote No. 265, on the motion to invoke cloture on Peter B. Robb, of Vermont, to be general counsel of the National Labor Relations Board. Had I been present, I would have voted nay.●

## CONFIRMATION OF KYLE FORTSON

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, last week the Senate confirmed Kyle Fortson to be a member of the National Mediation Board.

The National Mediation Board, established by the 1934 amendments to the Railway Labor Act of 1926, is an independent U.S. Federal Government agency that facilitates labor-management relations within the Nation's railroad and airline industries.

Pursuant to the Railway Labor Act, National Mediation Board programs help to resolve disputes to promote the flow of interstate commerce in those industries through mediation, representation, and arbitration of labor-management disputes.

A dedicated public servant, Kyle Fortson is eminently qualified to serve on the National Mediation Board. I am fortunate to say that Mrs. Fortson currently serves on my staff as labor policy director at the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions—HELP—Committee, after serving in that position from 2010 to 2013 for Senator MIKE ENZI. I have benefitted from Mrs. Fortson's experience, knowledge, and counsel.

Mrs. Fortson previously served as labor counsel at the same committee from 2004 to 2010. Before that, she was a policy analyst at the Senate Republican Policy Committee from 2003 to 2004 and served as counsel to Senator Tim Hutchinson from 2001 to 2003. She also served as judiciary counsel to Congressman Spencer Bachus from 1999 to 2001.

Mrs. Fortson graduated with a B.A. in history from the University of Colorado in 1996 and with a J.D. from George Washington University in 1999.

Mrs. Fortson was nominated on June 26, 2017. On July 3, 2017, the committee received Mrs. Fortson's Office of Government Ethics paperwork, including her public financial disclosure and ethics agreement. Based on these documents, the Office of Government Ethics wrote to me that Kyle Fortson "is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest." The committee received Mrs. Fortson's HELP Committee application on July 27, 2017. Mrs. Fortson was favorably reported out of the HELP Committee on October 18, 2017.

While the National Mediation Board will be very fortunate to have Mrs. Fortson as a member, her departure will be a loss to the U.S. Senate and the HELP Committee. I am proud to support Kyle's nomination, and she will serve on the National Mediation Board with distinction.

## DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today I wish to shine a spotlight on the increasingly dire political, security, and humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Senator BOOKER

and I, along with Senators DURBIN, COONS, WARREN, MARKEY, and BROWN, recently sent a letter to President Trump urging the administration to take immediate action to ensure that the United States is prepared to do our part to help stave off further violence and human suffering.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, or the DRC as it is known, is a country of vast natural resource wealth. It is the largest country in sub-Saharan Africa by land mass, with ample arable land, a variety of precious minerals, and the world's second-largest river, the Congo, which possesses substantial hydroelectric potential; yet, despite an abundance of natural resources—indeed, because of it—the people of the DRC have endured centuries of exploitation and atrocities. In the postcolonial era, the country has struggled with decades of conflict, endemic corruption, and extreme poverty. The DRC ranks 176th out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index. Life expectancy is 59 years. An estimated 77 percent of the people live on less than \$2 a day. More than 12 percent of children do not live to see their fifth birthday. Mothers die in childbirth in more than 7 out of every 1,000 live births. The statistics are truly alarming.

The 1997 to 2003 civil war involved at least seven countries in the region and, by some estimates, caused 5.4 million deaths from war and war-related causes. The conflict was characterized by massive human rights violations and introduced the world to the brutal consequences of the mining of conflict minerals. Eastern Congo has been referred to as the rape capital of the world, and sexual violence continues to be used as a weapon to traumatize and terrorize the population.

Despite the establishment of truth and reconciliation committees by the Sun City Accords in 2002, the installation of a unity government in 2003, and the deployment of the largest United Nations peacekeeping force in the world, the country remains unstable. The peacekeeping mission in DRC plays a critical role in protecting civilians in conflict areas and promoting stability; yet its capabilities are limited, and it is not a substitute for a political agreement respected and adhered to by all relevant stakeholders. Let me be clear: I fully support MONUSCO peacekeepers who seek to uphold their mandate. Though the mission has come under criticism over the years for not doing enough to protect civilians and for controversies regarding its own abuses, we must ask ourselves what would have happened—and what might still happen—if the UN were not present—or if the United States forces such significant troop reductions that the mission is rendered ineffective, which I fear we may be perilously close to doing.

Despite the deployment of peacekeepers and despite the Sun City Accords, conflict, instability, and meddling by other countries in DRC persisted. It took another 10 years and the efforts of the UN and the African Union to put the Congo on a path towards true stability in 2013 through what became known as the Framework of Hope, in which other governments pledged noninterference; yet, instead of building on this landmark agreement over the past 4 years to achieve reconciliation, stabilization, and development, the country has become subsumed in new conflicts and instability due to political leaders' self-interested and shortsighted calculations.

DRC's long and as yet incomplete road to peace is a classic example of how pernicious longstanding conflicts require persistent, high-level diplomatic engagement to untangle and address root causes. International diplomacy often isn't swift or easy, and sometimes the parties take two steps forward and one step back. It is often frustrating. It is often exhausting, but it is always essential. The work of former Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Russ Feingold, who was constantly in the region engaging with heads of state, was instrumental in holding neighboring countries to their commitments under the Framework of Hope, which reduced violence and insecurity. The work of Senator Feingold's successor, Tom Perriello, was instrumental in helping obtain a political agreement in the DRC in 2016 that held the promise of achieving democratic elections and an end to sweeping government abuses against unarmed civilian protesters.

The current spread of violence within the DRC serves as a painful reminder of how critical it is that we continue to work not only to maintain the gains we have made on the international front, but also the fragile respect for democracy and good governance inside DRC. According to the constitution adopted in 2005, elections should have taken place in November of last year, and President Joseph Kabila, having served two terms, should have stepped down. Instead, President Kabila first tried to change the constitution and then, when that effort failed, he threw up obstacles—slow-rolling voter registration, underfunding the electoral commission, and insisting on a unilateral and hurried process for the creation of new provinces—all of which precipitated a political crisis late last year when it became clear that the polls would not be open. While the opposition engaged in good-faith negotiations with the government to come to agreement on a new election timeline, Kabila has once again refused to abide by the terms. In fact, elections planned for the end of this year per that December 31 agreement—duly signed by the ruling party and the opposition—will not take place until December 2018. President Kabila's decision to remain in power beyond his mandate and

to walk away from last year's political deal has caused instability and upheaval that, if not directly responsible, appears to be feeding growing violence and unrest in various parts of the country, this time including in areas of the country that had been largely been stable.

Government forces and progovernment militia are accused of gross human rights violations in the Kasai region. Two UN investigators, including an American, were killed in the region in March as they attempted to look into allegations of human rights abuses by security forces, and multiple researchers have uncovered evidence of potential involvement by state actors in their murder. The UN has not ruled out involvement by government forces, but more investigation is needed. At least 80 mass graves have been discovered. Over 5,000 people have been killed since 2016, according to some reports. The lives of hundreds of thousands of children and their families in Greater Kasai have been turned upside down by this brutal violence, with nearly a million and a half people internally displaced in the Kasai alone, including 850,000 children. Just last week, the head of the World Food Program warned that, if WFP did not receive funding and access to the area, hundreds of thousands of children would die over the next couple of months. All told, nearly 4 million Congolese are internally displaced—over a million newly displaced in Kasai alone just over the last 12 months—giving DRC the dubious distinction of having the most internally displaced people in Africa.

We have a moral obligation to pursue peace. We cannot stand by and allow conflict in DRC or anywhere else spiral so far out of control that an untold number of women are victims of sexual violence, and millions die from conflict, starvation, and preventable disease.

We have a moral obligation to try to halt mass atrocities wherever they occur. The scale of violence perpetrated against civilians in Congo has been staggering.

We should care because the world is supporting a massive peacekeeping operation in the country to the tune of \$1.14 billion a year, of which the U.S. will pay an estimated \$325 million this year. We need the MONUSCO mission to be efficient, we need it to be effective, and we need to create conditions for it to end, but the only way for the mission to draw down in a responsible fashion is as peace and stability are progressively achieved. Therefore, the United States, a leader in the international community, must do more to help facilitate a political process that will lead to a durable peace.

The problems in the Congo are not insurmountable, and our voice and diplomatic influence could help bring about a solution if the Trump administration is willing to make an effort to do so. There are several easy steps it could take immediately.

No. 1, the administration could fill critical vacancies. The President should immediately nominate an accredited Ambassador to Kinshasa. Our last Ambassador, a highly capable career foreign service officer, left his post in December. The President should nominate an Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs for Senate confirmation. The position has remained vacant for 9 months, with Ambassador Donald Yamamoto serving in the role in an acting capacity.

Second, on the heels of UN Ambassador Nikki Haley's visit to DRC last month—one of the first visits to the continent by a senior member of the Trump administration—I urge the delegation to capitalize on the momentum from that trip to push for the following: No. 1, implementation of the December 31 agreement; No. 2, broader cooperation with and support for the investigation into human rights abuses in Kasai; No. 3, ensuring there is a credible international investigation into the murder of the two UN investigators; and No. 4, sharing the assessment of the humanitarian emergency in the Kasais.

I understand that Gen. Thomas Waldhauser, head of U.S. Africa Command, accompanied Ambassador Haley. I hope that he will share his assessment and any recommendations he has related to MONUSCO's deployment. I urge Ambassador Haley to ask that the Security Council convene an emergency meeting to discuss the findings of her trip. Finally, the administration should reexamine the decision in March of this year to lower MONUSCO's troop ceiling, given conditions in the country and the observations of the returning delegation.

We must use all the tools at our disposal, such as the Atrocities Prevention Board, to devise concrete actions our diplomats can take to stave off further violence. The White House should consider tightening sanctions on the regime. So far, we have sanctioned six sitting or former senior government and security officials, as well as a private company owned by one of them, under Executive Order 13671 issued in 2014. Sanctions have proven effective at getting Kinshasa's attention and should be applied in an ever-tightening manner aimed at the highest levels of government until we see demonstrable progress towards implementing the December 31 agreement. The Global Magnitsky Act is another tool that the administration could use to further pressure the regime.

The last conflict in DRC caused a regional conflagration that I consider among the worst in the continent's recent history in terms of the toll on human lives. It should never be repeated. The administration can and should take the steps I have just outlined immediately. While simple and straightforward, they could prevent further bloodshed. A repetition of the war is not inevitable, and I hope the President will take action to forestall

an increasingly dire humanitarian and political crisis in the region.

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

#### 85TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE HOLODOMOR

• Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, today we solemnly mark the 85th anniversary of the Holodomor—the Ukrainian famine genocide—that claimed the lives of millions in the 1930s. As part of its vicious crusade promoting a failed ideology, the Soviet Union perpetrated a forced starvation campaign against ethnic Ukrainians, hoping to erase their place in history and their cries for freedom and independence. We must never forget these crimes against humanity. Ukraine today faces a different kind of threat from its neighbor Russia's ongoing occupation of its land and aggression towards its people. We must recall the lessons from history and remain united in solidarity with our democratic friends and allies and all those who pursue freedom and justice. I am proud to represent a strong, engaged, and vibrant Ukrainian community in New Jersey, and I commend your efforts to continue to bring to light injustices of the past and efforts to promote a brighter future. •

#### TRIBUTE TO COLONEL ROGER PETERMAN

Mr. DONNELLY. Mr. President, today, I wish to recognize and honor the extraordinary service of retired U.S. Army COL Roger Peterman, a Greenwood, IN, resident and dedicated veteran and public servant who served his country with honor.

In 1967, Roger Peterman enlisted in the Army National Guard. He served in the field artillery in both enlisted and officer positions. He eventually moved through the ranks and rose to command two artillery batteries, an artillery battalion, the 38th Division Artillery, and held numerous staff assignments before retiring in March 2000.

Colonel Peterman's Army service was one of distinction, as evidenced by his numerous awards and decorations, including the Legion of Merit; Meritorious Service Medal with two oakleaf clusters; Army Commendation; Army Achievement Medal; and the Army Reserve Component Achievement Medal with a silver oakleaf cluster and two bronze oakleaf clusters. In 2012, he was presented the Office of the Secretary of Defense Medal, and in 2014, the National Guard Association of the United States awarded him the Distinguished Service Medal. In addition, Colonel Peterman was recognized with the Ancient Order of Saint Barbara Medal by the U.S. Field Artillery Association.

Colonel Peterman has distinguished himself beyond his military service. The transition from the military to civilian life can be a difficult one for our veterans. We are grateful for Roger's

post-military service mission to help veterans and military families through that transition with his work as a transition assistance adviser with the Indiana National Guard. Roger is also chairman of the Board for Operation: Job Ready Veterans, which aims to prepare our veterans for success in civilian employment; the Indianapolis Veterans Court Advisory Board; the Indiana National Guard Relief Fund; the American Legion; and AMVETS. Roger also serves on the board of directors for the Indiana chapter of the Association of the United States Army and is on the executive board of Indiana Blue Star. As Roger enters his "second" retirement, we thank him for his dedication and service to helping Indiana's veterans.

Colonel Peterman's life has set an example not just for his two children and six grandchildren but for all Hoosiers. His commitment to defending our country and supporting our veterans is commendable. His integrity and tireless efforts have helped to make Indiana and this country a better place to live, work, and raise a family. We thank Roger's wife Carolyn, children, and grandchildren for sharing him with our country. We wish Roger well in retirement.

#### RECOGNIZING EDEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Mr. DONNELLY. Mr. President, today, I wish to recognize Eden Elementary School of Greenfield, IN, for being named a 2017 National Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education.

Established in 1982, the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program recognizes schools that have demonstrated a vision of educational excellence for all students, regardless of their social or economic background. Since its inception, this program has allowed schools in every State to gain recognition for educational accomplishments, particularly in closing the achievement gaps among students.

Eden Elementary School has continually distinguished itself as a top-performing school in Indiana. For the last 4 years, Eden Elementary has been named a Four Star School and named an A-rated school by the Indiana Department of Education for 6 consecutive years.

Eden Elementary attributes much of its success to its effective implementation of the professional learning community model. Teachers are encouraged to focus on higher order thinking, integrating technology, and collaboration with math and reading instructional coaches. This model also allows teachers to work on targeted areas to improve an individual student's performance, which is contributing to the academic success of students. In addition, this interactive model enables teachers to share resources and ask questions to ensure the curriculum is being met across grade levels.

Beyond strong academics, Eden Elementary also prides itself on its character education program. This starts with Eden's Eagle Expectations—three rules: students should be respectful, responsible, and ready to learn. The school also promotes healthy habits by instilling in students the importance of considering the needs of others, listening first, and working together.

I am proud to recognize previous Eden Elementary School principal Devon Marine and current principal Melia Hammons, the entire staff, the student body, and their families. The effort and dedication you put into the education of these young people have led not only to this prestigious recognition but will benefit you and the Greenfield community well into the future.

On behalf of the citizens of Indiana, I congratulate Eden Elementary, and I wish the students and staff continued success in the future.

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

#### 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OAK RIDGE LEADERSHIP COMPUTING FACILITY

• Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, today we celebrate the 25th anniversary of high-performance computing at Oak Ridge National Laboratory's Leadership Computing Facility.

For a quarter century, Oak Ridge has led the way globally, pushing the boundaries of computational performance and continually giving scientists more powerful platforms for simulation and discovery at every scale—from the smallest building blocks of atoms to the vastness of galaxies—in biology, chemistry, physics, materials science, cosmology, industrial modeling, nuclear power, and more.

Using Oak Ridge's computing facility, scientists have expanded the scale and scope of their research, solved complex problems in less time, and filled critical gaps in scientific knowledge.

The Oak Ridge Leadership Computing Facility has led the rapid evolution of scientific computing that has produced a millionfold increase in computing power and has been home to both the first teraflop—1 trillion calculations per second—and the first petaflop—1 quadrillion calculations per second—systems for scientific computing. Oak Ridge has twice placed two supercomputing systems at the top of the international TOP500 list, where supercomputers are ranked by their number-crunching performance.

Today computer simulation is an essential part of modern science, but in 1992, when Oak Ridge established its Center for Computational Sciences, which was later renamed the Oak Ridge Leadership Computing Facility, not many people thought that the next great center for high-performance computing would be located in east Tennessee.