

So I want to thank the majority leader for that firm commitment to helping on an issue that has been critical to Alaskans for decades. We have never realized it. We have a lot more work to do before we get there, both on the tax bill and the 1002 area provision in it, but we are closer. We are closer, in large measure, because of the leadership of the majority leader, and I thank him.

Mr. President, I have been coming to the floor—many of us have been, actually—for the last several weeks to talk about a really important issue for the country; that is, getting administration officials in the Trump administration confirmed by this body. There has been a resistance, a desire to not want to move very qualified people, unfortunately, by my colleagues on the other side. It is just not helping the country.

With each new administration, our great Nation sees a peaceful transition of power. It is a remarkable pillar of American democracy. This doesn't include just the transition with regard to the President and Vice President but also the team of officials in the Federal Government at senior levels who are required to run this country. Good people, whether it is a Democratic or a Republican administration—Republican administration is not always easy to serve—and what we have been trying to do is help this administration find, get nominated by the President, and confirm high-quality American people in these jobs to serve their country.

As a Senator from Alaska, I have had particular focus on Alaskans to serve in positions of the Federal Government, and I will say that the Trump administration has been very receptive to a number of these highly qualified Alaskans who want to serve their country, but, unfortunately, what we are seeing on the other side is just obstruction. They don't want to move people. They never explain it.

I have come to the floor and given this speech several times, and I have asked for the minority leader to come to the floor to explain why they are delaying all of these very well-qualified Americans who want to serve their government. Come to the floor and explain it. Tell the American people why Assistant Secretaries across Federal agencies who have been waiting months to be confirmed by this body, who have been voted out of committee, with big bipartisan numbers, sit and wait and wait and wait. What good is that doing for the country? Come to the floor and explain it. I have been asking them to come to the floor and explain it, and they never take me up on the offer.

So, unfortunately, we know the numbers. At this point, 8 years ago in the Obama Presidency, almost 70 percent—almost 70 percent—of the nominees by President Obama, who won his election, were confirmed by the Senate.

Now, I wasn't in the Senate then, but I know my colleagues on this side of the aisle, if they didn't like someone,

they could vote against them; they could put a hold on them for a while and get their questions answered. So that is the way it worked. That is normal. Those numbers are about normal. At the same time now, under the Trump administration's Presidency, the Senate has only confirmed 40 percent—40 percent. Now, is that helping the country? No. It is not helping the country. Do they ever come to the floor and explain why they are resisting? No. So it is a frustration, and it is not helping the country. We need good people in government.

If this trend continues, with the number of people we need to confirm for the remaining Presidential-appointed positions, it will take us more than 11 years. Let me repeat that—more than 11 years. We all know a Presidential term lasts 4 years.

This is unprecedented. It is unprecedented; go take a look. Yet the other side doesn't want to explain why they are so focused on obstruction. It is certainly not helping the people. The vast majority of these nominees are really well qualified.

NOMINATION OF JOSEPH BALASH

I want to talk about someone I know really well who is part of this partisan logjam. He is an Alaskan. His name is Joe Balash. I am a little biased here; he was my former chief of staff in the Senate. But Joe is also the former commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources in Alaska; he was the deputy commissioner. What is the position he has been nominated for? To be the next Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Lands and Minerals—essentially, the Federal official who would be working with Secretary Zinke at the Department of the Interior to oversee Federal lands—minerals, mining, oil, gas, onshore, offshore—for the country. It is a really big job in Alaska; 66 percent of our lands are Federal. But this is a huge job for the country and a really important job, as we are trying to take advantage of this new energy renaissance in our Nation, which is great for the Nation, great for jobs, great for foreign policy, great for energy security.

Joe Balash comes super well qualified. The DNR commissioner in Alaska manages one of the largest portfolios of land, oil, gas, water, minerals, and timber of anyplace in the world—in the world.

Nobody doubts that Joe is very well qualified for this position. As a matter of fact, on September 19, Joe's nomination was voted out of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee by voice vote, which means unanimously, with the exception of one Senator who said that he wanted to vote no. Every other Senator—it was very bipartisan.

We might not fully agree with all the policies he wants. I was talking earlier about opening the coastal region of the Arctic Slope, the North Slope, in Alaska, which we voted on last week in the Senate. Certainly, Joe Balash is supportive of that as an Alaskan. If someone doesn't like that, they should just

come down here and vote against him, but he has been put on hold. I have been trying for weeks to figure out why. Who has a hold on him?

I want to compliment the Democratic whip from Illinois, Senator DURBIN. I reached out to him several weeks ago. He mentioned to me that he had a hold on him. He said that there were certain things he wanted to get from the Secretary of Interior in some meetings. So I worked with Senator DURBIN and Secretary Zinke, and after those meetings it looked as if it was all good. The Senator from Illinois said to me: We are ready to move forward with him. So I appreciated that; it was very constructive.

As I mentioned, I am not opposed to holds. Sometimes it is important to put holds on administration officials. I did it in the Obama administration. I have done it even for some Trump administration nominees. But what is going on here, after working with the Democratic whip, seemingly clearing out everything—and he thought we were, too—getting ready to move Joe Balash. No, all of a sudden, there is a “secret hold”—a secret hold on Joe Balash. He is very qualified for the job, but somebody has a secret hold.

My colleagues on the other side talk a lot about transparency, but this has been months now. Working with the Democratic whip—again, in good faith, and he worked hard and I am complimenting him as much as I can on this. Then someone else decides: No, I am going to keep holding. But I am not going to come down here and say who it is or why or how long they want or what else they want out of the administration or maybe it is a question for Mr. Balash.

My point is, if Senators want to vote down or oppose a nominee, they should make their opposition known and transparent.

We are going to have a vote here in a couple of minutes. After the vote, I am going to come back to the floor. I could do it right now, but I am trying to be respectful to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, even the secret holder, whoever he or she is. But I am going to come down and make a unanimous request to move Joe Balash forward. We have been waiting for months.

Maybe they don't want to show who the secret holder is, but I really hope my colleagues will come down and will not object. We are going to do this in a little bit, and I am going to essentially try to free Joe Balash. I am hopeful that we can agree on that and move this very well-qualified candidate forward. Maybe there is going to be an objection. We will see. I am going to ask for this in about half an hour. But if there is an objection, I certainly hope the secret holder is going to come to the Senate floor, speak to the American people, and say: Here is why I am secretly holding this guy, even though he is very well qualified, even though

unleashing the American energy renaissance for the country is great for everybody.

I am hopeful that whoever it is can show a little transparency. Hopefully, they will agree, but if they don't, come on down. Tell us who you are; tell us what the problem is.

We need to put good people in government, whether Democrat or Republican. Keeping people out of the government is not helping the American people. That is what is happening here, and, unfortunately, the other side is getting away with it. The media will not write about it, but it is a big problem, and people should be concerned.

Finally, in a couple of minutes, we are going to be voting on Kirstjen Nielsen for a really important job: the Secretary of Homeland Security. It goes without saying how important this job is. Every day, every minute of the day, that Department is trying to protect the American people, and we don't have a Secretary there right now.

I believe she is very well qualified. A number of people have spoken about her qualifications. I had a very good meeting with her on a whole host of issues. I certainly hope my colleagues will vote to move her nomination forward. If they don't like her, if they want to vote against her, great; vote against her. But we need good people in government, and there is no more important position right now in America than the Secretary of Homeland Security.

I encourage my colleagues to please vote to move her nomination and confirmation forward—but no more secret holds. If you have a problem, let us know what it is.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to finish my remarks before the vote begins.

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

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I am pleased to speak today in support of Kirstjen Nielsen in her nomination to be the sixth Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security.

The challenges facing the next Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security are daunting. Our national debt exceeds \$20 trillion, and there is, unfortunately, no serious effort to reduce the 30-year projected deficits, which exceed more than \$100 trillion.

In the last few months, we have experienced unprecedented destruction from natural disasters, stressing the budgets of both HHS and FEMA. Our borders are not secure, allowing illegal immigration to persist, illicit drugs to flow unabated, and making us vulnerable to external forces. Meanwhile, our enemies are emboldened.

The threat of Islamist terrorism has evolved, metastasized, and spread throughout the world, even reaching our homeland. We see increased stress

from cyber attacks, hacking, and social media-inspired acts of terrorism. We face perhaps the greatest danger from enemies within. In the past 5 years, 262 Americans have been killed and over 1,000 injured from acts of evil committed here at home. These are some of the challenges awaiting the next Secretary of Homeland Security.

The Secretary oversees a department that is composed of 22 separate agencies, each with a diverse mission. It employs 240,000 people, with a budget of \$66 billion. It faces challenges with unity of effort and habitually low morale.

President Trump nominated Ms. Nielsen to lead DHS, and she is ready to answer this call of duty. She has been working in and around the Department since its creation. Ms. Nielsen brings valuable, practical experience to DHS. She is an expert in risk management, with a focus on cyber security, emergency management, and critical infrastructure.

In the aftermath of 9/11, Ms. Nielsen served as the Director of the Office of Legislative Policy at TSA. She then moved to the White House Homeland Security Council as Special Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Senior Director for Prevention, Preparedness, and Response.

Before rejoining DHS earlier this year, Ms. Nielsen founded a risk and security management consulting firm.

Ms. Nielsen served as DHS Chief of Staff under then-Secretary Kelly, witnessing firsthand how the right leadership and support can quickly and dramatically improve agency morale.

General Kelly calls Ms. Nielsen a superstar. In a letter supporting her swift confirmation, he wrote: "What truly sets Kirstjen apart is her integrity, sense of service to our nation, and dedication to the men and women who risk their lives serving our great country every day."

Former Secretaries Tom Ridge and Michael Chertoff have also voiced their support, as have more than 40 former senior homeland security and intelligence officials from both parties. Secretaries Ridge and Chertoff wrote of Ms. Nielsen:

Ms. Nielsen is a homeland security leader for our times. More than any previous Secretary, she understands the 21st Century challenges of the borderless cyber domain and has worked in both the public and private sectors to address this deeply interconnected and consequential risk to America's national security and economic stability.

Kirstjen Nielsen offers our nation the credentials required of the Secretary of Homeland Security in today's environment: expertise in homeland security policy and operations; national and international perspective; and public and private sector experience.

I do want to thank my colleagues on the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs for their support and cooperation in moving this nomination quickly through committee and to the floor vote that we are about to undertake.

To my colleagues, I just want to say that we are fortunate to have a nominee with such experience and dedication to the mission of the Department of Homeland Security, and I urge all of you to support her confirmation.

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

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

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

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 Kirstjen Nielsen, of Virginia, to be Secretary of Homeland Security.

Mitch McConnell, Tom Cotton, Roy Blunt, Rob Portman, James E. Risch, Lindsey Graham, Richard Burr, Mike Crapo, John Boozman, Roger F. Wicker, Ron Johnson, John Thune, John Hoeven, Steve Daines, Marco Rubio, John Cornyn, John Barrasso.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Kirstjen Nielsen, of Virginia, to be Secretary of Homeland Security, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. CORKER), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), the Senator from Utah (Mr. HATCH), and the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. KLOBUCHAR), the Senator from Oregon (Mr. MERKLEY), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), and the Senator from Oregon (Mr. WYDEN) are necessarily absent.

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

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 59, nays 33, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 304 Ex.]

YEAS—59

Alexander	Cassidy	Cruz
Barrasso	Cochran	Daines
Blunt	Collins	Donnelly
Boozman	Coons	Enzi
Burr	Cornyn	Ernst
Capito	Cotton	Fischer
Carper	Crapo	Flake