

In fact, listen to this: There are 29 timber sales in Montana that are currently impacted by fringe litigation. Just today, we were informed that another timber project in Montana has been delayed by a restraining order because of litigation. That makes 30. This project was scheduled to start this coming Monday, July 2, and now those folks will be out of work. Reducing red-tape and combating chronic litigation doesn't erode public trust. In fact, it safeguards it. It does so by ensuring that the public feedback of the majority isn't obstructed by a few extreme dissenters.

This disastrous Ninth Circuit Cottonwood ruling must also be addressed because it imposed unnecessary paperwork that even the Obama administration has said had the "potential to cripple" Federal land management without conservation benefit.

My amendments would address this excessive redtape while continuing to ensure that robust, science-driven environmental review and public engagement would remain. Many similar provisions are found in the House bill as well.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting the inclusion of these amendments as we work together now, with the House, in a conference of the final farm bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

KILAUEA VOLCANO

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I want to share an update about what is happening with the Kilauea volcano in my home State of Hawaii.

The first thing people need to know is that the State of Hawaii remains safe to visit and that the Island of Hawaii, where the volcano is erupting, is also safe to visit.

Let's start with a basic geography lesson. Hawaii has eight main islands, and the volcano is on the Island of Hawaii, which people often call the Big Island. It is about 4,000 square miles. This is Hawaii Island. It is about the size of Connecticut. Only 9 square miles are directly impacted by the volcano. So it is actually just this little area in this corner of the island. If you are in the town of Hilo, which is 25 miles away from the volcano, you can't even tell there is a volcano erupting for the most part.

Cruise lines are coming back, and officials are trying to set up areas where people can safely view this spectacular volcano. It is that safe. People need to know that it is business as usual for lots of people on the Big Island and that both the State and the island are open for visitors. We just got the data in for the month of May, and we had again increased tourism statewide. Everyone should come to visit.

With that being said, this is an extraordinarily difficult situation for the communities that are being affected,

and even though people are used to living with volcanos, this is extraordinarily tough. Right here, we have fissure 8. This is about a 300-foot lava fountain that has not ceased for several weeks. As recently as 2015, lava approached the town of Pahoa in the Puna district, but we really haven't seen anything like this since the 1974 flow.

For the past few months, we have had 300-foot lava fountains. We have had ash explosions that have reached tens of thousands of feet. We have also had more than 30 billion gallons of lava that have destroyed 600 homes. An estimated 2,500 people have been displaced, one way or another, by the volcanic eruption. In certain areas, there is no power, no water, and no cell phone reception. So even if your home has not been destroyed, your access now may be limited or nonexistent.

Here is the really good news: There has been no loss of human life due to the volcano. Despite all that has happened, the people of Puna and the people of Hawaii Island remain extraordinarily resilient. The bad news is that no one is sure when the volcanic activity will end. Even the experts at the United States Geological Survey don't know. We have several difficult challenges in moving forward—from air quality to the need for economic relief and, especially, for housing and transportation. Hundreds of people are currently living in shelters. Hundreds of animals from homes and ranches are, in a sense, volcano refugees. So we have to secure temporary housing for people who lost their homes or who have been evacuated and then get these people permanent housing and deal with private property damage. We have to make decisions about where to rebuild and start the process of fixing roads, power lines, and other infrastructure in the Puna district.

The Big Island's mayor, Harry Kim, and the entire county emergency operations center team, including first responders, have been working from day one and day and night to keep people safe and deal with these challenges. Several weeks ago, I visited the emergency operations center and saw firsthand that it is really all hands on deck. Something that distinguishes our EOCs from other EOCs and impresses our Federal counterparts is the extent to which we all work together regardless of jurisdiction. You can scarcely tell who works for State, Federal, or county government. You can scarcely tell who is a business leader or a not-for-profit leader or a university professor or a mayor. Everybody is really working together.

There is a long list of people who deserve our thanks. Local media have gone above and beyond to keep people informed by assigning crews to stay in place for weeks at a time. By the way, that is somewhat unusual for a disaster, especially one that has been going on as long as this one.

Nonprofits, such as the Red Cross, the World Central Kitchen, and the

Salvation Army, are operating shelters and serving meals. Companies are pitching in by waiving freight charges for relief supplies or working to keep cell towers powered.

I can name every single elected official on Hawaii Island, and each one of them is personally doing significant work in the recovery. Because this is an island State and because it is a small community, this isn't just a matter of their trying to secure resources from State, Federal, or county government, and this isn't just a matter of lawmaking; they are on the ground, they are listening, and they are helping with their hands.

This is part of the general sense that people have of wanting to help during this extraordinary time. Several weeks ago, a resident of Puna named Ikaika Marzo took it upon himself to set up Pu'u honua o Puna, which means "a place of refuge" in Puna. People can donate things or pick up what they need, whether it is information, supplies, or a hot meal. We have seen people drive 100 miles to show up and help. Ranchers are helping out other ranchers—normally they are competitors—by housing displaced cattle. On other islands, people are filling shipping containers with donations. Across the State, we are helping each other out so that people are being fed, finding shelter, and getting the things they need.

Lots of good things are happening, but it is still a very tough situation, an ongoing situation, which is why we have been grateful for the Federal response. Two weeks ago, the White House approved the State of Hawaii's request for individual assistance from FEMA for residents whose homes have been lost or damaged. FEMA has also partnered with the State to open a disaster relief center. From the start, it was clear that they sent their A team. I want to thank FEMA and the White House for their quick action, which is welcome news during this challenging time for the Big Island of Hawaii.

FEMA and the EPA are also working with the State and county partners to monitor air quality, which the EPA is now publishing online so that the public can make informed decisions. This may sound like a small thing, but this is everything when it comes to determining whether Norwegian Cruise Line can come to Hilo, and all that economic opportunity will either be lost or not, or whether schools in the Ka'u and Puna districts can open. What EPA is doing in partnership with the State and county government is really extraordinary.

The Hawaii National Guard was able to command Department of Defense resources under a dual command agreement. General Logan, General Hara, and the National Guard have all been crucial. They are literally doing everything from collecting gas samples to providing security on the ground to providing temporary shelters.

We are grateful for all the help, but we also know it is a long road to recovery because we don't know how long

this is going to go on. In a normal disaster, you have sort of three phases: disaster preparation and planning, disaster response, and then disaster recovery. Because this is an ongoing situation and because we don't know when this is going to end, we have our county, State, and Federal folks, as well as the rest of the community, in disaster prep, disaster response, and disaster recovery—all simultaneously underway. This is an extraordinary situation. There are lots of terrible natural disasters all across the country every year, but this is unique in that particular way.

This is also unique in the sense that most of the time—not all of the time but almost every time—people can go back to their properties. Although they still, under the law, will own their properties, when Kapoho Bay was flattened, when we went from 87 homes, roughly, gone to about 600 homes gone in a very short period of time, it is difficult to imagine that these people are going to be able to remake their lives in the path of this current flow.

We have to do all three things at the same time. So we are going to continue to work and to look for Federal partners for help and for flexibility. I will state that our Federal partners have recognized the unique nature of this disaster, and we really appreciate it. I have talked to Majority Leader McCONNELL, Minority Leader SCHUMER, Vice Chairman LEAHY, Chairman SHELBY, and key appropriators about how unique this disaster is, and I look forward to working with the leadership in the Appropriations Committee so the communities affected by the volcano can get the help they need.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. YOUNG). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 836.

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 assistant bill clerk read the nomination of Mark Jeremy Bennett, of Hawaii, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Ninth Circuit.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. 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 assistant bill 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 Mark Jeremy Bennett, of Hawaii, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Ninth Circuit.

Mitch McConnell, John Cornyn, Deb Fischer, Mike Rounds, John Barrasso, John Hoeven, Roger F. Wicker, Shelley Moore Capito, Steve Daines, John Boozman, Orrin G. Hatch, Thom Tillis, David Perdue, Mike Crapo, Richard Burr, Pat Roberts, Johnny Isakson.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 639.

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 assistant bill clerk read the nomination of Brian Allen Benczkowski, of Virginia, to be an Assistant Attorney General.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. 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 assistant bill 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 Brian Allen Benczkowski, of Virginia, to be an Assistant Attorney General.

Mitch McConnell, Steve Daines, Chuck Grassley, Tom Cotton, John Kennedy, Marco Rubio, Thom Tillis, Mike Crapo, Orrin G. Hatch, John Barrasso, John Boozman, David Perdue, James Lankford, John Cornyn, Roger F. Wicker, John Thune, John Hoeven.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 686.

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 assistant bill clerk read the nomination of Paul C. Ney, Jr., of Tennessee, to be General Counsel of the Department of Defense.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. 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 assistant bill 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 Paul C. Ney, Jr., of Tennessee, to be General Counsel of the Department of Defense.

Mitch McConnell, Mike Crapo, Tom Cotton, Johnny Isakson, John Kennedy, John Thune, John Boozman, Tim Scott, Richard Burr, Thom Tillis, Roy Blunt, Cory Gardner, Roger F. Wicker, Mike Rounds, John Cornyn, John Barrasso, Jerry Moran.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls for the cloture motions be waived.

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

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 923, 925, 927, 928, 929, 930, 932, and all nominations on the Secretary's desk in the Foreign Service.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.

The assistant bill clerk read the nominations of Robin S. Bernstein, of Florida, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Dominican Republic; Joseph N. Mondello, of New York, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago; Gordon D. Sondland, of Washington, to be Representative of the United States of America to the European Union, with the rank and status of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary; Harry B. Harris, Jr., of Florida, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of