

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

FAREWELL TO THE SENATE

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, I intend to be giving a number of speeches over the course of the next couple of weeks to comment on various matters on which I have had the privilege of working.

I want to say, with regard to the election, that things turned out a little differently than Grace and I had expected, but let me say that I have been very, very blessed. That is because I have had the privilege of serving the people of Florida and our country for most of my life, and I don't think anyone could have been more honored by having a lifetime of public service. I was not victorious in this race, but I still wish to strongly reaffirm the cause for which we fought: A public office is a public trust.

First, I want to say thanks to all who have rallied to our cause, both here in the Senate and in Florida. You knocked on the doors, you walked the precincts, you made the phone calls, and you contributed your time and your resources. With an optimistic heart, I wish to say something else: We may have been heavily outspent, but we were never outworked.

To all Floridians, I say to you this, whether you voted for me or for my opponent or you didn't vote at all: I ask that you never give up this fight. A public office is a public trust, and there are a lot of other things that fall under that category of public trust.

You must fight to protect the fundamental right to healthcare and against any attempt to roll back our progress on things like preexisting conditions. Most everybody has a preexisting condition. If it is not required that an insurance company cover you, then either your rate is prohibitively high or else you don't get coverage at all. Out of the 20 million people in the State of Florida, 8 million people have a preexisting condition.

You must continue the fight to preserve the natural wonders of our State, from the Everglades to the pine forests and to the beaches and the offshore waters. Say no to drilling off our coast—not one rig off of our coastline—not only for the sake of our environment but for the sake of our tourism economy and for the sake of the largest military testing and training area for the U.S. military in the world right off of our coast.

As a country, we need to continue to launch rockets and to explore the heavens. I have seen the blue brilliance of the Earth from the edge of the heavens, and I will fight on to save this planet, our homes, and our cities from the spreading plague of greenhouse gases

that infect our atmosphere, play havoc with our weather, and risk the planet our children and grandchildren will inherit.

Every single one of us needs to keep fighting to strengthen Social Security and Medicare for the generations that are yet to come. It is your Medicare. It is your Social Security. You pay into these programs. They belong to you and not to the politicians who are plotting to rob you of your retirement.

I will continue to fight on and on for the inalienable human rights that are the soul and glory of the American experiment: civil rights, women's rights, LGBT rights, and the sacred right to vote. We must end all forms of voter suppression, make it easier for Americans to vote, and honor the ideal that we are governed by the majority and not by minority rule.

There are great decisions ahead that will shape the course and character of America in the 21st century. Yes, I will continue to fight—and to fight hard—for what is right. I will also encourage others to seek common ground with their colleagues and the other side of the aisle. Inevitably, at times that effort will fall short, but we have to try. We have to move beyond a politics that aims not just to defeat but to destroy, where truth is treated as disposable, where falsehoods abound and the free press is assaulted as the enemy of the people.

Whether an institution such as this Congress will be effective in the future depends on whether the people who make up this institution can get along, where we retreat from the tribalism that has captured American politics and where men and women of good will can come together. As the Good Book says, “come now, and let us reason together.”

There has been a gathering darkness in our politics in recent years. My hope today can be found in the words of John F. Kennedy, who said civility “can guide us through that darkness to a safe and sane future.”

Thank you all for the privilege of a lifetime of public service. God bless you, and God bless our country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Madam President, I wish to address the Senator before he leaves.

I represent the great State of Georgia, which is north of the great State of Florida. I have had the pleasure of serving with this Senator for a long time in a lot of capacities. He has made a huge contribution to his State and to his country. We worked together on a lot of other interests, like the Prayer Breakfast in the Senate and many other things like that.

I want to commend the Senator for his speech, commend him for his remarks, and commend him for his lovely wife, amazing Grace, whom I love very much. I thank the Senator very much for his service to the people of the

State of Florida and the United States of America. May God bless him.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

NOMINATION OF STEPHEN ALEXANDER VADEN

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, I rise today to speak in support of Stephen Vaden to be the next General Counsel of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. I know this is a position that you care about deeply as the Presiding Officer. Having been brought up and worked on a family farm that has operated for generations in West Tennessee, Stephen has critical insights into the issues facing the agriculture community. His experience in law and understanding the needs of farmers will be an important asset at the USDA and in Congress's work to help rural America prosper and grow.

Under Stephen's tenure as Acting General Counsel since March of last year, the Office of General Counsel has promoted Department accountability and improved its responsiveness to civil rights issues, and it is my belief that Stephen will continue to do so once confirmed.

I am pleased to see that the Senate is acting on Stephen's nomination, and I urge my colleagues to support his confirmation.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, within a few minutes, the Senate will vote on ending debate on the nomination of Stephen Vaden to be the General Counsel of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. I am glad to see that. I am here to strongly support Mr. Vaden and urge my colleagues to support him.

Stephen Vaden grew up on a family farm in Union City, TN, way out in the west end of our State, and he has some academic credentials for this job which are also very strong. He attended Vanderbilt University and Yale Law School. He has had two strong mentors—Judge Julia Gibbons of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, who was once my counsel when I was Governor of Tennessee, and Judge Hardy Mays of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Tennessee. He practiced with two distinguished law firms in Washington, DC. He has hands-on academic credentials. He has hands-on farming credentials. He has a strong background in legal training.

Mr. Vaden has the strong support of his Congressman, Mr. DAVID KUSTOFF from West Tennessee. This is Davy Crockett's old congressional district in Tennessee.

Tennessee Farm Bureau President Jeff Aiken said that Mr. Vaden “has a passion for agriculture that can't be taught but is necessary” for the job of General Counsel.

Secretary Perdue, Agriculture Secretary, said that Mr. Vaden “has a firm grasp of the legal issues facing American agriculture, and very importantly, understands the breadth and complexity of the regulatory burdens

placed on our producers." The Secretary finished by saying: "Our farmers, ranchers, foresters, and producers will be well served by his counsel."

I know the distinguished Presiding Officer has a strong interest and a hands-on background in agriculture, and so do many other Members of this body on both sides of the aisle. I am happy to strongly recommend Stephen Vaden to my colleagues. I urge a "yes" vote on ending the debate. Once that has ended, I urge a "yes" vote on confirmation of his nomination by President Trump.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam 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 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 Stephen Alexander Vaden, of Tennessee, to be General Counsel of the Department of Agriculture.

Mitch McConnell, Johnny Isakson, Mike Rounds, Thom Tillis, Mike Crapo, Pat Roberts, John Hoeven, David Perdue, Tim Scott, John Cornyn, Roy Blunt, Cory Gardner, Tom Cotton, Jerry Moran, John Barrasso, Roger F. Wicker, John Boozman.

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 Stephen Alexander Vaden, of Tennessee, to be General Counsel of the Department of Agriculture shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Idaho (Mr. CRAPO), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), the Senator from Mississippi (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is necessarily absent.

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

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 49, nays 45, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 245 Ex.]

YEAS—49

Alexander	Flake	Perdue
Barrasso	Gardner	Portman
Blunt	Grassley	Risch
Boozman	Hatch	Roberts
Burr	Heitkamp	Rounds
Capito	Heller	Rubio
Cassidy	Hoeven	Sasse
Collins	Inhofe	Scott
Corker	Isakson	Shelby
Cornyn	Johnson	Stabenow
Cotton	Kennedy	Sullivan
Cruz	Kyl	Thune
Daines	Lankford	Tillis
Donnelly	Lee	Toomey
Enzi	McConnell	Young
Ernst	Murkowski	
Fischer	Paul	

NAYS—45

Baldwin	Harris	Murray
Bennet	Hassan	Nelson
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Peters
Booker	Hirono	Reed
Brown	Jones	Schatz
Cantwell	Kaine	Schumer
Cardin	King	Shaheen
Carper	Klobuchar	Smith
Casey	Leahy	Tester
Coons	Manchin	Udall
Cortez Masto	Markey	Van Hollen
Duckworth	McCaskill	Warner
Durbin	Menendez	Warren
Feinstein	Merkley	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Murphy	Wyden

NOT VOTING—6

Crapo	Hyde-Smith	Sanders
Graham	Moran	Wicker

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 49, the nays are 45.

The motion is agreed to.

The Senate majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. 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.

CENTENNIAL OF THE KENTUCKY FARM BUREAU

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, it is my pleasure today to recognize one of the greatest voices for Kentucky's agricultural communities, the Kentucky Farm Bureau, KFB, as it prepares to commemorate its centennial year. With a mission to identify the challenges facing farmers, to improve farm income, and to enhance the quality of life for growers, processors, and all of us who enjoy the fruits of their labors, the KFB has been a force for good throughout my home State. Since its establishment almost 100 years ago, the KFB has done all of this and more. I am so proud to have this opportunity to congratulate the men and women of the KFB on this impressive milestone.

In 1919, a small group of Kentucky farmers gathered in Louisville to form an organization to serve as the "Voice of Kentucky Agriculture." Beginning as a member-based and member-driven

organization, the KFB has proudly kept to its founding vision, striving each day to uphold that same goal.

In the last 100 years, the KFB has grown beyond anything its founders could have imagined. With nearly 500,000 members, the organization maintains a presence in all 120 counties in the Commonwealth. The KFB has developed many service programs to benefit its members and other parts of the agricultural community. These services include providing crop insurance products, Young Farmers development, public affairs representation, and estate planning assistance, just to name a few. As it celebrates its centennial year, the KFB can also be proud of being one of the largest State Farm Bureaus throughout the entire Nation.

Since my first day serving in the U.S. Senate, I have had the opportunity to be Kentucky's champion on the Senate Agriculture Committee. Every step of the way, the KFB has helped guide my work on that committee on behalf of my State's farm families. Through several agricultural bills—and countless fly-ins, the KFB has proved to be a partner I can rely upon to support Kentucky farmers. We have accomplished a great deal, and I look forward to many more projects we can work on together.

One particular event I look forward to each year is the KFB's annual country ham breakfast during the Kentucky State Fair. I make it a point to attend every year possible so I can not only have the opportunity to enjoy the delicious food, but also to spend quality time with the many friends of Kentucky agriculture I have gotten to know over the years. The tradition began in 1964 as a way to showcase our agricultural products during the Kentucky State Fair, and it has grown into one of the Nation's premier agricultural events. Each year, thousands of Kentuckians from across the Commonwealth gather to enjoy some of the best locally sourced food our State's farmers have to offer. The morning culminates in a charity auction of the blue-ribbon country ham. This year, the winning bid was a record-breaking \$2.8 million to be donated to Kentucky charities. While the ham breakfast may be among its best-known public events, it is just one example of the KFB's many accomplishments.

Throughout 2019, I hear the KFB plans to celebrate its century of successes on behalf of Kentucky's farmers. I would like to recognize the contributions of the organization's leadership, in particular Mark Haney and his executive team. They are wonderful representatives of the KFB and proud advocates for farmers. With their guidance, the KFB has a bright future ahead.

I urge my Senate colleagues to join me in the recognition of the KFB, its members, and all who have benefited from its century of service to Kentucky. The organization's unmatched dedication to farmers and commitment to agricultural advancement continues