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Senate

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Stephen Alexander Vaden, of Tennessee, to be General Counsel of the Department of Agriculture.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following the cloture vote on the Kelley nomination, the Senate recess until 2:15; further, if cloture is invoked, all time during the recess counts postcloture on the nomination.

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

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, the Senate returned from our Thanksgiving recess and got back to work.

Since the election earlier this month, there has been plenty of prognostication about what the new Congress will bring, but I would rather focus on the one we are still involved in, and this Congress has more business to complete before the end of the year. Even after two historic years of accomplishments for the American people, there are still important items left to check off our list.

Yesterday evening, we voted to advance the nomination of Stephen Vaden, the President's choice, to serve as general counsel for the Department of Agriculture.

Mr. Vaden has strong legal credentials, both public and private sector experience, degrees from Vanderbilt and Yale, and he comes with an upbringing in agriculture. He grew up on his family's farm in Union City, TN—and according to the Tennessee Farm Bureau,

it shows. As my friend Senator ALEXANDER referenced yesterday, that organization wrote that Vaden has "a passion for agriculture that can't be taught, but that is necessary for the job" of general counsel.

It is hardly surprising, then, that this nominee received bipartisan support at the committee level, including the support of the ranking member.

What is surprising? The fact that since clearing the committee, Mr. Vaden's nomination has languished for 351 days, waiting for Senate Democrats to end their obstruction—long, even by the standards of this Congress. So I hope that each of my colleagues will join me in turning the page and voting to confirm Mr. Vaden later today.

Following the Vaden nomination, we will turn to consideration of Karen Kelley to serve as Deputy Secretary of Commerce. She is a graduate of Villanova. She has built a 35-year record of expertise in investment, management, and financial strategy.

She currently serves as Undersecretary—a position to which she was unanimously confirmed by the Senate—and oversees the Department's statistical programs through the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Ms. Kelley is already acting in the role to which she has been nominated.

Through this service, Ms. Kelley has earned the respect and esteem of her colleagues at the Department. Secretary Ross has said he is thankful to have such a qualified individual fill the position.

I hope my colleagues will join me in voting to advance her nomination today with a strong bipartisan vote.

As we look over the record of this 115th Congress, a number of accomplishments were made possible with significant bipartisan support—from landmark opioid legislation to major improvements in veterans' medical care and services, to our tremendous progress on appropriations and a lot more.

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Almighty God, awe and wonder grip us as we think about Your love, wisdom, and power. Thank You for choosing us to serve You and country. Guide us in our work and strengthen us for every challenge.

Lord, bless our lawmakers. Give them the wisdom to make a commitment to integrity. May they refuse to deviate from right paths, seeking always to accomplish Your purposes on Earth. Use them to help those whose hopes are crushed, who live on life's margins with no expectations of better times to come.

Remind our Senators each day of their accountability to You. May they press on with the duties of this day with hope in their hearts.

We pray in Your holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TOOMEY). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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Our remaining work will require more of that bipartisan spirit when it comes to closing out appropriations, confirming more nominees, and other subjects as well. So let's continue the momentum and keep moving forward.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNIZING A NEW CERES STATUE FOR THE VERMONT STATE HOUSE DOME

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, this Friday, November 30, at noon, Vermonters will be gathering to see a large crane carefully hoist a 14½-foot carved statue of Ceres, the goddess of agriculture, atop the newly gilded dome of the statehouse in Montpelier. I was born in Montpelier, and I am proud of this because it is going to be a great moment for our State and for everyone involved in the project, which has captured the attention of not only Vermonters but of those who have been following the project from great distances with the help of social media.

The new version of Ceres replaces a 1938 replica of the original statue that was removed last April after too many severe Vermont winters took a toll on the wood figure. Since that time, Vermont artists Jerry Williams and Chris Miller have been hard at work creating the new Ceres, first sculpting a model and then, out of a big piece of mahogany, they chiseled the final mahogany figure.

Marcelle and I and my sister Mary, along with David Schutz, had the pleasure of visiting the Vermont Granite Museum in Barre, VT, a few months back to witness Mr. Miller at work.

I am the grandson of two stone carvers. One of my grandfathers immigrated to Vermont from Italy. The other, my Irish grandfather, carved stone in Barre. So it was a thrill to see how Mr. Miller used the original tools of the trade.

He took raw wood and turned it into the fine details we now see, from Ceres' flowing robes to the distinctive veins in her hands. It was really remarkable to see this hunk of wood turn into a real person.

Both artists learned their techniques by studying in the studios of Barre's stone carvers. It is a specialized art that requires intense dedication, patience, skill, and practice. We are so fortunate that artists such as these have carried on a tradition that makes Vermonters proud.

It reminds me of the times as a child when I would go in and watch stone carvers at work in Barre, where my father was born, and watch them turn stone into pieces of pure art.

In this case they are using wood. Incidentally, the reason the statue is made out of wood instead of stone is

that wood weighs less, and there is only so much weight the dome can hold.

I grew up in a home across the street from the Vermont State House. Ceres was always in our sights. Walking to school, coming back from school, doing my paper route, and being out with my brother and sister and my parents, we would always see Ceres. She is a strong figure, one that befits a State where farming and soil and hard work are so closely linked to our lives.

Frankly, over the past few months, when I have been home in Vermont, going by the statehouse and seeing it without Ceres has been odd because it has always been part of my life. So this Vermonter and Vermonters like my wife Marcelle and others are going to be glad to have her back.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that this November 10 article from the Barre, VT, Times Argus, profiling these two sculptors be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Times Argus, Nov. 10, 2018]

FOR THE LOVE OF CARVING: JERRY WILLIAMS AND CHRIS MILLER EARN GOVERNOR'S HONORS
(By B. Amore)

Jerry Williams and Chris Miller are united in their love of the ancient craft of carving. It is this common love that has brought them together as a team in creating the 14.5-foot statue of Ceres for the Vermont State House dome. This project, and their separate accomplishments, have won them the 2018 prestigious Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts, which will be presented by Gov. Phil Scott at the State House Nov. 14.

Carving, a reductive process that was once part of every classical sculptor's training, has now become the purview of a discrete selection of artists in the United States. Barre, of course, is a mecca of stone carving, primarily in granite. Its community of skilled carvers who work in the monument trade, as well as executing large public art sculptures and making their own personal work, is a unique resource.

The native stone of the surrounding region, and the culture of carved sculpture, drew both Williams and Miller, albeit by different paths. Williams talks of attending the art program at Johnson State College and being the only one interested in learning clay sculpture. It was at a time when conceptual work and mixed media held sway in the art world, but he was interested in learning the basics of sculpture. In order to learn "real" sculpture at the source, he set up an internship with Frank Gaylord, who trained a generation of Barre sculptors. That internship turned into a job and a life in granite.

Eventually, Williams founded his own shop, the Barre Sculpture Studio. He talks of belonging to a "lineage" in the sense of the classical studio system that exists in Carrara, Italy, and that was brought to Barre and to the Vermont Marble Company in Proctor in the 19th century.

Generally, a well-known sculptor would create a model and the expert carvers in the sculpture studios would then execute it. "Youth Triumphant," a Barre monument depicting a young warrior pleading for world peace, was carved by Gino Enrico Tosi, Enrico Mori and John Delmonte from a model created by famous New York sculptor C. Paul Jennewein. Williams is one of the

few sculptors in Barre who creates his own model for a commission and then sees it through to execution in his studio.

Miller began woodcarving independently in 1976 while studying art at Southern Connecticut State University and Southern Vermont College in Bennington. Although he is largely self-taught, he worked with the sculptors Lothar Werslin and Billy Brauer of Vermont to hone his skills in drawing, sculpture, and anatomy. For his first 25 years as a working artist, he carved only in wood.

Living in Calais, in Barre's shadow, it was inevitable that Miller would eventually carve stone. Finding his way to the studios of several Barre sculptors, he learned the rudiments of stone carving, and since then has been working in wood and stone, doing both public commissions and personal work.

According to Miller, Williams' classical studies have enabled him to become one of the best figurative sculptors in Vermont. As Miller meticulously carves the Ceres statue in wood, he is constantly taking measurements from Williams' exquisite model.

Williams is a consummate artist and craftsman, and builds his models from the inside out, beginning with a metal armature, layered over with clay to create a nude body, then layering clothing on that. His knowledge of anatomy underlies the figure, giving it a much more realistic sense than most contemporary sculptors are able to achieve with less rigorous means. Miller's own anatomy studies enhance the liveliness of his carving so that there is an incredible flow to Ceres' robes—something that is very evident in the supine form that is near completion at the Vermont Granite Museum in Barre.

Miller's portraits in wood are incredibly sensitive. The character of the individuals shines through the seemingly obdurate material. Miller is imbued with a love of carving and speaks of feeling relaxed and joyous at the end of a day of work. His portrait piece "Stanley Fitch," complete with eyeglasses carved on the face, feels like an integral part of his subject's personality.

The elderly farmer, "Percy," and the couple, "Howard and Dot," are more expressive and personal than a photograph or a painting. The character of each person seems alive before our eyes, under Miller's sensitive strokes. The flow of the lines of carving, all done by hand, follow the form as intimately as a sculptor's fingers working clay. This is an extraordinary achievement and a real legacy creation for many generations.

Most of Miller's personal work in granite and marble is figurative. The female form seems to be of endless inspiration to him. He has also joined forces with other sculptors who have an ongoing project at the Millstone Hill Sculpture Park on the site of the old Websterville quarry. There is a plentiful supply of grey Barre granite, and one never knows when one of Miller's trolls or Hephaestus, the god of fire, might emerge from an old quarry block. Another popular work is a sculptural truck that Miller built, with community support, that resides in Maple Corner, Calais.

Miller doesn't see much of a difference between public and private work. He approaches them with the same spirit. With personal sculptures shown in galleries, he never knows where they will end up. With a public art piece, the area has to be researched, and the artist has to come up with an idea that is relevant. For one commission in Marion, Iowa, a bike-centric community, Miller designed a bike rack supported by granite gloves carved from the town's photos. One of his bike racks featuring gargoyles engaged in an eternal tug of war graces Barre's North Main Street.

Williams' approach to working with clients on public commissions is a genuinely collaborative one, whether he is working on a