

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 senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Bernard L. McNamee, of Virginia, to be a Member of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for the remainder of the term expiring June 30, 2020.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 12 noon will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Minnesota.

NOMINATION OF BERNARD L. MCNAMEE

Ms. SMITH. Madam President, I rise to discuss the urgency of addressing climate change. I will also address the nomination of Mr. Bernard McNamee to be a member of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which we are debating on the Senate floor today.

Recently, the Trump administration released the latest installment of the National Climate Assessment. This report is the work of over 300 expert scientists and 13 different government agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Energy, NASA, and others. The report makes an urgent case for action by detailing the extreme threat that is posed to our Nation and to our world by climate change.

The need for forward-looking environmental and energy policies is obvious to anyone who reads this report, and it is telling that this report was mandated by a law signed by the late George H. W. Bush in 1990—a President whose life we came together to celebrate yesterday.

The Trump administration doesn't want to talk about the report's findings, but the problems of a changing climate are already well known to us in Minnesota. Our winters are milder than they used to be. Rain patterns are changing. We are now prone to long, hot dry spells in the summer, but when the rains do come, they are more intense. Big storms used to be rare in Minnesota, but now we suffer more than almost anywhere else in the country from these climate-driven increases in so-called mega-rain events. When it rains 6 or 8 or even 10 inches all at once, houses flood and fields flood. The water can't run off or soak into the soil fast enough. As Minnesota's Lieutenant Governor and now as a Senator, I have seen the consequences of these storms.

Without action on climate change, these problems are only going to get worse. Even to those who have long accepted the scientific consensus on climate change, the new report makes for a sobering read. The assessment tells us that if greenhouse gas emissions continue unabated, "the Midwest is projected to have the largest increase

in extreme temperature-related premature deaths." By 2090, the Midwest can expect 2,000 additional deaths a year alone due to heat. That will be more than in any other region in the country.

We know that there are health consequences to a warming climate and also important impacts on our food supply. Minnesota is a vital contributor to our world's food supply. We rank fourth in the country in corn production, and corn is our No. 1 agricultural commodity. In 2017, Minnesota farmers produced \$4.5 billion of corn on 8 million acres. This agricultural productivity is threatened by climate change. The problem going forward is that corn doesn't tolerate extreme warm temperatures. Corn plants grow best at approximately 80 degrees, and above 95 degrees, reproductive failure is a risk. U.S. corn yields per acre grew 60 percent from the 1980s to today. Because of warming temperatures, the climate assessment warns that we risk losing all of these productivity gains by 2050.

A world with nearly 10 billion people at midcentury is going to need American farmers to produce even more than ever. Climate change threatens our farmers' ability to rise to that challenge. This is why I agree with the National Farmers Union, which says:

We can't wait for technology to solve climate change. We must take action now.

We grow more than just corn in Minnesota. For example, the Anishinaabe people in my State harvest the world's finest wild rice. The climate assessment states: "Declines in production are expected, related to increases in climate extremes and climate-related disease and pest outbreaks as well as northward shifts of favorable growing regions." The loss of wild rice in Minnesota would be a cultural, ecological, and economic tragedy.

The climate assessment also highlights the economic stakes. Climate change threatens to reduce the size of the U.S. economy by up to 10 percent by the end of this century—a loss of hundreds of billions of dollars per year.

In response to the extreme challenges that we face from climate change, I see two potential ways to respond.

First, the path offered by Mr. McNamee would be that we do nothing to acknowledge this problem.

As the Department of Energy's deputy general counsel, Mr. McNamee pushed a dirty coal plant bailout that would have cost American consumers billions of dollars a year with there being no discernible benefit to our energy system and a huge loss in our fight against climate change. That is why the proposal was rejected unanimously by the five FERC Commissioners. Now Mr. McNamee is nominated to be one of those Commissioners.

To avoid dealing with the climate change problem, Mr. McNamee has—like many in the Trump administration—decided that the first, best tactic

is to deny there is even a problem. In February of this year, Mr. McNamee spoke at a policy orientation for legislators in Texas. When he was asked about how his son and other students should react to being taught climate science in schools, Mr. McNamee said:

Just deny it. I don't care if you get an F. I don't care.

I reject Mr. McNamee's head-in-the-sand approach, which is a fundamentally pessimistic approach to America's ability to lead the fight against climate change by leading the clean energy revolution. I, by contrast, am an optimist.

The thing about the clean energy transition is that it is going to happen with or without American leadership. Between now and 2050, the world will invest \$11.5 trillion in building new electric generators. Almost 9 in 10 of those dollars will be spent on renewables and other technologies with zero carbon emissions.

The United States should lead the way in developing, making, and deploying clean energy technology; however, right now, China is leading the way. China leads the way in renewable energy investments, and it spent \$127 billion in 2017, which outspent the United States by more than 3 to 1.

We know that Americans want to step up. California and Hawaii have put themselves on a path to 100-percent clean energy by 2050. Just this week, Xcel Energy, which is the largest utility in my State, pledged to deliver 80 percent in carbon dioxide emission reductions by 2030, with a goal of having 100-percent emissions-free electricity by 2050.

States, companies, and individuals can help lead the way, but that doesn't take the Federal Government off the hook. We must pull together as a country. The scale of the challenge requires national and international coordination and cooperation. The United States can lead, or we can be left behind. We led the way during the fossil fuel revolution, and we were rewarded with world-leading prosperity. There is a new revolution happening.

Mr. McNamee and President Trump both believe that we can prosper by doubling down on outdated thinking regarding energy and climate, but they are wrong.

I urge my colleagues to vote no on this nominee. It is the duty of those of us in Congress to push for a clear-eyed but optimistic path forward and not to let misguided ideology leave us stuck in the past.

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

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

REMEMBERING GEORGE H. W. BUSH

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, over the last few days, since the death of

President George Herbert Walker Bush, we have heard about his life and his legacy. It has been, really, a celebration of a life well lived. It is hard to imagine someone packing more into 94 years than George H. W. Bush packed into his life. We heard about his time in the Navy, when he volunteered after Pearl Harbor, became a naval aviator, was shot down, and was saved by a submarine that popped up and rescued him. We, of course, know about his devotion to public service, but we also learned a lot more about his sense of humanity, his humility, his loyalty, and his optimism.

Sometimes in Washington it seems like the message is all negative, and I think this has been a delightful contrast, reflecting on his life and his contribution.

I have said previously, talking about President Bush, that there is nothing as powerful as a good example. I think his example is one we all ought to contemplate and perhaps strive to emulate in our own way and in the way we conduct our business here.

When people disagree with us, it doesn't mean they are bad people; they are just people with different ideas. We ought to respect one another enough to actually debate those ideas, rather than engage in name-calling and denigrating the level of discourse among us because people watch us too. They watch how we conduct ourselves here, and they take some cues from that in how they conduct themselves online, in PTA meetings, in our communities, and in our States.

This has been a delightful week. It has been kind of an emotional and exhausting week as we have grieved with the Bush family but at the same time, as I said, celebrating an incredible life.

SENATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Madam President, perhaps we have about 2 more weeks of work before the end of the year. I am told the House will pass a 2-week continuing resolution, taking us up to December 21. We will have a chance to pass that here. The window of opportunity for us to finish our work in the Senate is closing rapidly, and there is a lot we need to get done. We have an opportunity to build off of accomplishments we have made in these last 2 years and to get our remaining to-do list checked off.

The leader called the Senate fertile ground for productive, bipartisan work. That is because the way we are built, the way our rules are constructed, it basically requires us to do things in a bipartisan way in the main.

Several of our biggest achievements for the Senate in this Congress couldn't have happened without bipartisan support, like the landmark opioids legislation to help those struggling with drug addiction or the historic bill to improve veterans' care, shepherded by Senator ISAKSON, the Senator from Georgia.

Our work for the rest of the year will also require cooperation in a bipartisan spirit, particularly when it comes to

funding what is left of our government. We have already joined together to fund roughly 75 percent of the Federal Government on time and through regular order for the first time in two decades. That is pretty remarkable and welcomed.

While we complete our work on the remaining appropriations bills, I expect a lot of the focus to be on border security. It is no secret, coming from a border State, that this is very serious business to me. I know it is to many of our colleagues. We have been reminded by the caravans of migrants from Central America—sweeping across Mexico and ending up in Tijuana, right across from San Diego—that collectively we have a lot of work to do to address these mass migrations.

I went to Mexico City on Saturday with Vice President PENCE; the Secretary of Energy, Rick Perry; the Secretary of Homeland Security, Kirstjen Nielsen; and other officials who were there. We had Members of the House, and Senator LEE from Utah and I were the Members of the Senate representing the U.S. Government at the inauguration of President Lopez Obrador.

What we have read, including today, that the incoming Lopez Obrador administration has already been hard at work, working with our Homeland Security officials to come up with an agreement to deal with these mass migrations—these caravans of people coming from Central America, across Mexico, and seeking asylum in the United States.

I have spoken many times about how these so-called caravans have been preceded by minicaravans; that is, smaller numbers of people coming to our border and seeking entry and, in many instances, seeking to exploit loopholes in our law that only Congress can fix. I am frustrated, like many of us, that we have been unwilling to get our Democratic colleagues to work with us to fix those loopholes.

What I am encouraged by is, the incoming administration of the Mexican President as well as the Trump administration have worked to arrange for these asylum seekers to spend their time in Mexico waiting for their asylum claims to be adjudicated. I think that is a big change in the way Mexico has regarded this issue.

Previously, they have regarded the issue as our problem, not their problem. They have actually issued transit visas for people to transit Mexico. Basically, the message is: As long as you don't stop here, we are not going to do anything about your coming across Mexico. Now they realize this is their problem and our problem, and the only way we are going to be able to solve this problem is working together, along with the governments of Central America, where people are fleeing gang violence.

It is hard to blame people for fleeing when they realize their circumstances are so dire in their home country, but

I think there is a lot we can and we should do, working with them, to help them improve circumstances in their home countries so they don't feel they have to come to the United States to seek asylum and turn themselves over to the tender mercies of the drug cartels and the people who view them as just another commodity by which they make money, just like heroin they sell in the United States, just like children and women whom they traffic for sex slavery. These drug cartels are the same organizations, the transnational criminal organizations. I don't think that reality has quite sunk in here in Washington.

These are not nice people. These are dangerous people. All you need to do is look at the trial of El Chapo occurring in Manhattan—the head of one of the largest cartels—and read about some of the evidence that has been introduced. The U.S. Government has extradited him to the United States and is now prosecuting him. The evidence will chill your blood. He is a vicious, dangerous person whose only interest is in making money and enriching himself and his fellow cartel members.

I am encouraged by some of these nascent discussions that will perhaps lead to an agreement between the Government of Mexico and the United States.

In addition to completing our most basic task of funding the government, we have to work hard to get more of the President's team in place. I have never seen an administration more sandbagged with more foot-dragging by the Senate and the Democrats when it comes to confirming noncontroversial nominees to serve in the President's administration. This is just another way to undermine their ability to get their work done there.

This is one of our greatest responsibilities under the Constitution, to provide advice and consent to the President's nominees, whether they are judges, whether they are Ambassadors, or wherever in a Senate-confirmed position in the administration.

We have seen a record number of cloture votes during the last 2 years because, again, our colleagues on the other side have simply wanted to burn the clock, waste time, and then vote overwhelming to confirm noncontroversial nominees. All that does is prevent us from getting our work done on a timely basis and makes it harder to fill these vacancies.

In the first 2 years of the Trump administration, the majority leader, the Senator from Kentucky, has made nominations a top priority, particularly judicial nominations, but we still have a number of nominees with exemplary records waiting for confirmation.

I talked to Mike Pompeo, the Secretary of State. He said they have a number of ambassadorships, a number of important positions in our diplomatic corps vacant for no other reason than the foot-dragging and the obstruction we have seen by the other side. It