

I have spent my career protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for future generations, and today I will not support the nomination of David Bernhardt to undermine the protections we have worked so hard to put in place. We must stand up for the generations yet to come that cannot yet speak to protect our public lands and our oceans.

At the same time, the Trump administration is trying to roll back the fuel economy standards for the vehicles we drive. In other words, since we put 70 percent of all the oil we consume in our country on a yearly basis into the gasoline tanks of the vehicles we drive in our country, if you increase the fuel economy of every one of those vehicles, it will reduce the amount of oil you need to drill for.

What do the Republicans want to do? What do the oil companies want? What do the Koch brothers want? What does ExxonMobil want? Well, it is very simple. By not increasing the fuel economy standards of the vehicles we drive, we need more oil because cars will consume more in the course of a year. They then say: Ah, let's turn to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—a sacred place—and find more oil, because the vehicles we drive won't be that efficient.

What kind of sacrifice are we going to make in our country because the Koch brothers and ExxonMobil want to have more oil drilled for? We are going to have the Trump administration say: The only way we can justify it is if the cars, the light trucks, the SUVs that people drive are not that efficient; therefore, we need all the oil we can get, even though we are a technical giant and we know we can make these vehicles so much more efficient, so we never have to drill there. That is a sin against the environment and a sin against our country and future generations that should be able to enjoy this pristine area, the wildlife refuge.

Let's move on to another part of the wheel of giveaways—even more oil that will be another giveaway during the Bernhardt time at the Department of the Interior.

On January 4, 2018, the Department of the Interior announced a plan to revise the offshore drilling plan to eliminate protections for the east and west coasts, the eastern Gulf of Mexico, and the Arctic Ocean. The plan proposed to open up more than 90 percent of the U.S. coastlines to oil and gas leasing.

Since then, the bipartisan opposition has been deafening. All Governors along the east and west coasts have opposed or expressed concerns about expanded oil and gas exploration off their coasts. More than 340 municipalities and over 2,100 elected local, State, and Federal officials have formally opposed offshore oil and gas drilling and seismic airgun blasting in our ocean. But David Bernhardt is not listening to those concerns. Instead, he is listening to his former fossil fuel clients. He is moving ahead with this terrible off-

shore drilling plan that would threaten State after State with the threat of a spill in the ocean off of those States.

We should not confirm Bernhardt to lead the Department of the Interior. Handing the keys to the beaches of our country, the coastlines of our country, and our fishing and tourism industries in our country over to Big Oil is not what our citizens want. That is the opposite of what we need to do to protect our environment, but that is what David Bernhardt and his fossil fuel friends want.

There is no reason that we have to drill off of the coastlines of our country right where people who are swimming will be watching these oil rigs that are going to be drilling down into those ocean areas off of our beaches to find oil that we don't need. If we increase the fuel economy standards of the vehicles we drive, we will be able to back out the need for all of that additional oil. That is the sin against the environment that is being committed. That is the agenda of David Bernhardt's at the Department of the Interior.

Instead of being the United States of America—a technological giant that invents its way to the new automotive technologies that reduce the amount of oil we need and reduces the amount of greenhouse gasses that go up into the atmosphere—with David Bernhardt as the Secretary of the Interior, partnered with the new coal lobbyist who is running the EPA, we are going to wind up with more greenhouse gasses going up into the air, a reduction in the efficiency of the vehicles we drive, and putting more profits into the pockets of the Koch brothers and ExxonMobil and the auto industry, which also wants to reduce the fuel economy standards of the vehicles we drive. This is a sin against our environment but also our identity as the technological giant of the planet.

We can do this. We can make our cars more efficient. We can have plug-in hybrids. We can have all-electric vehicles. We can create a revolution that avoids the necessity of drilling off of our beaches and drilling in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge. We can do this, but that is not what Donald Trump wants. He wants fossil fuel industry representatives at the Department of the Interior and EPA running these Agencies.

David Bernhardt's ties to Big Oil—the very industry he is tasked with regulating—are as deep as an oil well. Those ties should be disqualifying for anyone nominated to head the Department of the Interior. We need to stop the pollution of our democracy by Big Oil interests.

I urge my colleagues to vote no on the nomination of David Bernhardt. I ask my colleagues to consider what we can do to avoid the necessity of despoiling these sacred environmental locations in our country for the oil industry, for the Koch brothers.

This is a big moment, this vote we are about to cast. This is one more step

by Donald Trump that will result in far more greenhouse gases going up into the atmosphere, far more danger being presented to places that should be put off limits to the oil industry because of the risk of environmental danger that would result from that permission to drill.

That is why we should all pause and really consider whether we want to go deeper and deeper into an era that is completely avoidable if we unleash the technological might of our country.

When President Kennedy went to Rice University in 1961, what he said was that we were going to have a mission to the Moon and that mission would require us to invent new metals, new alloys, new propulsion systems that did not exist, and that within 10 years, we would have to then bring that mission back safely from the Moon through heat half the intensity of the Sun and do so successfully.

Auto mechanics is not rocket science. We already know how to improve the fuel economy standards of the vehicles we drive. We don't need nuclear physics and we don't need aeronautical engineers to help us do this.

President Kennedy challenged our country, and we responded. President Trump is like J.F.K. in reverse. He is saying that we can't do it; that, instead, what we have to do is, here on Earth, be the leaders in spoiling our most sacred environmental locations.

That is why today is such a monumental opportunity for the Senate to say no on a bipartisan basis to David Bernhardt, who is someone who does not deserve the post of Secretary of the Interior.

I once again urge a “no” vote from all of my colleagues.

I yield the floor.

Madam President, 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.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

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

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

NOMINATION OF DAVID BERNHARDT

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I am pleased to be here today to speak in strong support of David Bernhardt's nomination to be Secretary of the Interior, and I thank all of my colleagues on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. We worked pretty hard together to report Mr. Bernhardt's nomination last week. We moved it out with good bipartisan support. I also thank the majority leader for filing cloture this week so that we can confirm him before we depart for this 2-week work period.

I have several reasons—I have a whole host of different reasons to outline as to why I support Mr. Bernhardt's nomination. I outlined them

before the committee, but I would like to take a couple of minutes here this afternoon to reiterate them on the Senate floor.

First, really, is his background. He understands and is in touch with our public lands. Mr. Bernhardt is from the West where, of course, the vast majority of our public lands are located. He grew up in Rifle, which is a small town in Western Colorado. He spent a lot of his summers in Wyoming. He, to this day, remains an avid sportsman and outdoorsman. He likes hunting and fishing. He is a guy who appreciates the outdoors.

He is really almost unparalleled in terms of the experience that he brings to the job. He has worked at the Department of the Interior now for about 10 years, including two Senate-confirmed posts. Back in 2006, we confirmed him as Solicitor by voice vote, and then in 2017, we confirmed him to be the Deputy Secretary. Again, that vote was a good bipartisan vote. He has now served as Acting Secretary since January of 2019, so we have a situation where, simply put, he has more experience at the Department than any other previous nominee for Secretary, except one. That is a pretty good credential there.

Of equal importance, Mr. Bernhardt has the right perspective to be the Secretary of the Interior. He understands how Federal land management decisions affect our local communities. He has seen how Federal policies impact people's access to and use of public land, and he also recognizes the need to balance conservation and opportunities for economic development.

I think David Bernhardt has really proved his ability to lead the Department. He is well qualified. He is highly competent. He has built strong working relationships with those who are affected by the Department's decisions. I really think there is no question that he is ready for the job. He can handle everything it entails.

I have been asked by several of the reporters who are out there: What do you think David Bernhardt really brings to the table? What I have shared with them is that as I have gotten to know David Bernhardt in his various capacities at Interior, he is a guy who understands and enjoys the policy of these issues. He likes to get down into the fine details. He knows the background. He is not just being given something by staff to read. He is the one who is really engaged in understanding at a level of detail that is greatly appreciated.

When I think about the importance of this position of Secretary of the Interior, I come at it from the perspective of an Alaskan coming from a State that has more Federal acres than any other State. The Department of the Interior controls most of those. We often refer to the Department, and the Secretary specifically, as our landlord. That is not necessarily a title we like. We like to consider ourselves a partner,

but I think we truly recognize we need leadership to understand and appreciate the impact their decisions within the Department of the Interior can have on us. I know David Bernhardt understands that. He has been a good partner for Alaskans, but he has also been a good partner for individuals, groups, and States all across the country, and that is why his nomination is supported by a wide range of stakeholder groups from the Alaska Federation of Natives to Ducks Unlimited, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

I think it is also important to note that Mr. Bernhardt moved through our committee process in pretty good order. He answered all of our questions. Again, he demonstrated the depth of his understanding of the issues and his expertise. He really exceeded expectations, which led to a very strong bipartisan vote of 14 to 6 at the business meeting last week.

Now the full Senate has the opportunity to confirm Mr. Bernhardt. Some will continue to make allegations over ethics, but the fact is, as we have reviewed those charges, we have found nothing that should hold him back. I know this has been a subject of discussion on the Senate floor, so I want to lay it out very clearly. There are some news stories that are being printed and have been printed that are filled with old information that has already been reviewed by our committee staff. New stories, old facts—they don't contain anything new or anything disqualifying. There is nothing amiss here, and there is no valid reason to delay this process.

The Office of Government Ethics has certified that Mr. Bernhardt is in good standing; so has Interior's Designated Agency Ethics Official. My committee staff has contacted Interior's Inspector General. It has been confirmed that there are no open investigations into Mr. Bernhardt. I would tell folks that what needs to happen here is that we need to move forward. We need to reject the last-minute rhetoric that is designed to delay. We need to confirm a well-qualified candidate to be our next Secretary of the Interior.

We have a lot to do. Interior has a lot to do to make sure that we are protecting our lands, increasing our energy security, as well as fulfilling all of the missions of the Department, and the sooner we are able to confirm a Secretary to focus on them, the better.

Mr. Bernhardt is very well qualified to be the Secretary of the Interior. He has the right background, the right experience, and the right perspective for the job. He is ready to lead on a permanent basis, and I am glad that very shortly here we are going to be considering his nomination. I strongly encourage every Member in this Chamber to support his confirmation.

Madam President, I come to the floor to speak to the robust support that David Bernhardt has received for his

nomination to be Secretary of the Interior.

Last week, those of us on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee reported Mr. Bernhardt on a strong, bipartisan vote of 14 to 6. He has actually added support from the last time that he was considered in committee, in 2017, and I hope we will see that again when we vote on his nomination later today.

Mr. Bernhardt's support is not limited to the Senate. For example, the Congressional Western Caucus is solidly behind Mr. Bernhardt, with many of its members on record in support of his nomination.

Bear in mind, these are members from Western States, where the vast majority of our public lands are located, whose districts are most impacted by the Department of the Interior. It is a very good sign that Mr. Bernhardt has drawn their strong support.

We have also kept a list of individuals and groups who have submitted letters of support for Mr. Bernhardt. It spans the spectrum of stakeholders, from the Public Lands Council and the Colorado Farm Bureau to the American Exploration and Mining Association and the Corps Network.

Multiple recreation groups have written in urging the Senate to confirm Mr. Bernhardt. The motorized recreation groups, like the American Council of Snowmobile Associations and the Off-Road Business Association, wrote that, "At a time when many of the senior posts at the agency lack Senate confirmed executives, a person of Mr. Bernhardt's experience is sorely need . . . having [him] at the helm of the Interior Department will strengthen the agency's resolve to make the lands it manages accessible to the recreating public."

Officials at all levels of government are voicing their support for Mr. Bernhardt's nomination. The Governor of Wyoming, Mark Gordon, offered this statement: [Mr. Bernhardt's] recognition of expertise in the States is refreshing . . . I wish [him] a speedy and easy confirmation process."

The Mesa County Commissioners in Colorado wrote that "Mr. Bernhardt's extensive knowledge of public lands and energy issues makes him an avid leader with skill to see issues from multiple perspectives to maintain and improve partnerships among federal, state, and local governments."

The Harney County Court in Oregon has highlighted Mr. Bernhardt's commitment to balancing the multiple use of public land, writing that, "[He] has proved himself in the past by exhibiting understanding between the balance that is needed from an ecological standpoint, but also, what is needed from the economic and social aspect of public land use. He will work towards a balanced approach by trying to assess and distinguish between the multiple issues that we are facing with the [bureau]."

Tribal groups and entities are also supportive of his nomination. In my home State, the Alaska Federation of Natives noted that, “Mr. Bernhardt has demonstrated a thorough understanding of the legal frameworks of the major laws covering Alaska Native subsistence customary and traditional rights and protections . . . he listens well, is articulate in his responses, and draws reasonable conclusions.”

The Chairman of the Southern Ute Indian Tribal Council wrote in that, “the [Tribe] has worked with [Mr. Bernhardt] previously and firmly believes that his knowledge and experience make him a very good fit for the Department . . . we also believe he is committed to building strong working relationships that rely on good faith and respect among all interests at the table.”

We have truly heard from a very wide range of organizations in support of this nomination. The Archery Trade Association wrote to us that “[Mr. Bernhardt] has demonstrated tremendous commitment to conserving and protecting our nation’s natural, historic and cultural resources . . . [his] experience with the Department of the Interior coupled [with his] exemplary history of collaboration, non-partisan views, highly respected demeanor and deeply held passion for conservation and historic preservation make him uniquely qualified for this position.”

One of the reasons that such a diverse group of stakeholders support Mr. Bernhardt’s nomination is that they have worked with him during his nearly ten years at Interior, including most recently as Deputy Secretary and then Acting Secretary. He has proven that he can work with groups, he has formed strong relationships with them, and they respect and support him.

For example, the Gila River Indian Community wrote that, “based on our experience in negotiating and working on complex issues with Mr. Bernhardt we support his position as Secretary of the Department of the Interior. We believe he has an understanding of Tribal sovereignty and the United States’ trust responsibility to Tribal nations.”

The Corps Network wrote that “Mr. Bernhardt has been accessible and responsive to our inquiries, visited several Corps in the field, and joined the Corps Network’s Day of Service last summer.”

These groups are reiterating what we already know—that Mr. Bernhardt’s experience at Interior and in the West; his willingness to listen, build relationships, be responsive; and his ability to earn people’s trust make him more than qualified to lead the Department of the Interior.

I want to wrap up by reading an excerpt from a letter that we received from the Beaver County Commission in Utah: “In our interactions with Mr. Bernhardt we have found him to act with integrity, be open minded to all points of view, and have a contagious passion for the health of our Nation’s

lands and people. These qualities, combined with many others, make Mr. Bernhardt an ideal candidate to serve the county by leading the Department of the Interior.”

I couldn’t say it any better. Mr. Bernhardt knows the Department and the laws that govern it inside and out. He appreciates and respects the Department’s mission. He is the right person for the job—the best person to lead Interior—and I look forward to his confirmation.

REMEMBERING SELINA EVERSON

Madam President, before I relinquish my time, I just want to take a very brief moment to note that a friend, a leader, an extraordinary role model for many Alaskans—certainly in the Alaska Native community—has recently passed.

Selina Everson was a language and culture warrior in Southeastern Alaska and one who fought for the Tlingit language and culture preservation. She was an extraordinary woman and role model. She grew up speaking Tlingit. It was her first language. In school, she was told: You can only speak English. She broke that rule and courageously spoke Tlingit anyway. She was a champion for her culture.

We mourn her passing. This woman not only was considered Grandma Selina and considered by hundreds of children in schools in Southeastern Alaska as a friend and a relative, I considered her one as well. I was honored that she was the one who helped adopt me into the Deisheetaan clan and gave me the honor and treasured name of Aan shaawatk’i, Lady of the Land. So know that I send my prayers to Selina’s family as they face this loss.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASIDY). The assistant Democratic leader.

TRIBUTE TO MJ KENNY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I come to the floor this afternoon to honor a member of my staff. I thank Senator FISCHER and Senator MANCHIN for giving me an opportunity to speak at this moment.

MJ Kenny has been part of my team in the Senate for 9 years, and for the past several years, he was a constant on the floor of the Senate as deputy floor director of my staff. At the end of this week, he is going to be moving on to a new professional opportunity.

Unlike many of us who work in this building, MJ actually is a resident of the Washington, DC, area. He graduated from Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda, MD, a suburb of the city of Washington.

Walt Whitman wrote in his essay, “Democratic Vistas,” the following: “Did you too, O friend, suppose democracy was only for elections, for politics, and for a party name?” Walt Whitman understood that democracy is more than campaigns. Democracy is certainly more than just yelling at one another. Democracy is a process. It is a daily dedication to the institutions and norms and the rule of law. Making de-

mocracy work takes skill and commitment, and it takes many people who are willing to make a sacrifice and see the demands for long hours and the demands for time on the floor as part of their democratic commitment. This can demand great patience and great sacrifice. I think Walt Whitman would have given MJ Kenny high marks, as do I.

For the last few years, MJ has helped to make sure the Senate does the daily work of democracy. I have counted on him to make sure that my interests were represented on the floor of the Senate, that my constituents in Illinois had a voice in the Senate, and that stories about Dreamers and other important information be shared in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD with my colleagues and beyond. Making certain that the information was floor-ready was a responsibility of MJ Kenny, and he handled it professionally.

MJ and my floor director, Reema Dodin, are my dynamic duo who help make things happen around here. Together, they are my eyes and ears on the floor when meetings and other obligations take me away. MJ has also been a big help to so many other Senators.

He came to my office 12 years ago for an informational interview. We tried to decide whether we were right for one another. Luckily, I came to the conclusion that this graduate of Northwestern University in Chicago with a degree in history, who had already interned for then-Congressman and now Senator CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, was a good fit for my team and a good prospect to help us move forward. I gave MJ Kenny his opportunity, and I am sure glad I did. He flourished.

In one year he moved from legislative correspondent to legislative aid to becoming a key part of my floor team. In every job he has done for me, MJ has been a steady, reliable partner. Even in difficult times, he works long hours without complaint and with grit and good humor.

In college, he studied history. In the U.S. Senate and on this floor for the last 9 years, he has not only witnessed history, he has helped to shape it. I couldn’t ask for more in a staff.

I suspect that some of what MJ knows about patience and perseverance he learned as a lifelong, long-suffering Baltimore Orioles fan. It is like being a Chicago Cubs fan. Among his treasured possessions on his desk is a bobblehead of Manny Machado, the former O’s third baseman and Golden Glove winner. Just as Manny Machado left the O’s, MJ Kenny is leaving the Senate at the end of this week. I want to wish him continued success and thank him again for being such an important part of my team over the years.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, first of all, I want to thank MJ also, on behalf of Senator DURBIN. His staff does a