

great job, and we always enjoy working with them. MJ, enjoy your new endeavor in life.

NOMINATION OF DAVID BERNHARDT

Mr. President, I rise today to speak on the nomination of Mr. David Bernhardt to be the Secretary of the Interior. The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources voted to report David Bernhardt's nomination to be the Secretary of the Interior last week by a vote 14 to 6. Members on both sides held and continue to hold strong feelings on Mr. Bernhardt's nomination. Both sides have scrutinized his record carefully, as we should, considering the enormous responsibility entrusted to the Secretary of the Interior.

Whether it be payments for miners for their healthcare benefits, processing permits for the privilege of energy production on Federal lands, or ensuring the U.S. Geological Survey can conduct its critical work of collecting and analyzing data on our changing climate, the Department of the Interior has a huge amount of responsibility and diverse jurisdiction. Furthermore, the Secretary of the Interior is the guardian of our Nation's greatest natural resources.

The Department of the Interior manages nearly half a billion acres of Federal land, or about 20 percent of the Nation's land. One of every 5 acres in the United States is under their control. These lands include some of our most special places—our national parks, trails, seashores, and historic sites. In addition, the Department manages another 1.7 billion acres of submerged land on the Outer Continental Shelf.

The Department of the Interior is also the largest supplier of water in the 17 Western States. It manages nearly 500 dams and over 300 reservoirs that supply water to over 31 million people and irrigate 10 million acres of farmland.

Furthermore, nearly 20 percent of energy we use is produced on lands managed by the Secretary. These include not just coal and oil and natural gas but also hydropower, geothermal, solar, and wind energy. In addition, the Secretary of the Interior manages our trust obligations to nearly 600 federally recognized Indian Tribes and provides services to nearly 2 million Native Americans.

By any measure, the job of Secretary of the Interior is an enormous and special responsibility.

As a former Governor, I have always believed that an executive is entitled to deference when selecting his or her team, as long as the candidates are qualified and ethical. I have carefully reviewed Mr. Bernhardt's experience and his qualifications. I met with him twice before his hearing and spoke with him again by phone afterwards. I questioned him extensively about his willingness to be a good steward of our Nation's greatest natural treasures—our national parks, monuments, and his-

torical sites. I questioned him about his responsibility to balance our resource needs with environmental protection and fairness to the owners of our public lands, which are all of us, the American people. I spoke to him about the need to make sure that those who are granted the privilege of using our public lands leave them in better condition than they found them.

Based on my extensive discussion with him and my review of his record, I believe Mr. Bernhardt is clearly qualified to serve as Secretary. He held senior positions in the Department for 8 years during the Bush administration, including over 2 years as the Solicitor, which is the third highest office in the Department. He has served as the Deputy Secretary for the past 2 years and as Acting Secretary since January. He knows the Interior Department inside and out, and he is well-versed on all of the issues that come before it. He clearly has the knowledge and experience to serve as Secretary.

Now, the opposition to Mr. Bernhardt's nomination comes not from any lack of knowledge or experience but from questions about appearances of conflicts of interest arising from his law practice prior to being confirmed as Deputy Secretary. I had extensive conversations with Mr. Bernhardt about these potential conflicts of interest and his compliance with ethics laws and regulations. I reminded him that he takes the same oath I take—public service, not self-service. We also spoke about the importance of ensuring a culture at the Department of the Interior that reflects the highest level of ethical compliance and integrity.

Based on my extensive discussion with Mr. Bernhardt and the assurances he gave me, I voted for him in the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources last week, and I will support his nomination when we vote on the floor to confirm him.

But I said before the vote in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee—and I will say it again—that I expect him and the Department to hold itself to the highest ethical standards because I assured him I will. Mr. Bernhardt must work to ensure the commitment to ethical and scientific integrity, and I intend to work with him and his staff persistently to ensure this is the case.

Our parks and public lands, our scenic beauty, and our fish and wildlife resources are important to everybody and especially to the people of West Virginia, which I represent, and to the people of all of our States and to the Nation's outdoor recreation economy. West Virginians count on the Secretary of the Interior as the guardian of our public lands, as I know you do, Mr. President, in Louisiana.

The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, which I am privileged to serve on as ranking member, has a lot of work to do. We have to address the park maintenance backlog. We

have to fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund, ensure that companies granted the privilege of developing public energy and mineral resources pay the royalties they owe the taxpayers and nothing less, and see that our public lands and resources are wisely managed and protected.

I intend to work with Mr. Bernhardt on these important issues. I have made it clear to him that I expect him to put his extensive experience and knowledge of these issues to work for all the American people and to execute his responsibilities in a manner that ensures that our public lands are not just being maintained but improved for the benefit of generations to come.

For that reason, I will vote to confirm him to this important position, and I ask your consideration for the same.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

ICBMS

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, recently I came to the Senate floor to speak about the airborne leg of the nuclear triad. Today I rise to discuss the value of another leg of the triad—our intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs.

Following the brief deployment of the Atlas and Titan ICBM weapon systems in the early 1960s, the United States deployed the first Minuteman ICBMs in support of the strategic deterrence mission. Over half a century later, today the United States deploys 400 Minuteman III ICBMs, each carrying a single warhead. While the Minuteman III system was deployed in the 1970s, much of its technology dates to the previous decade. The system was originally designed for a 10-year service life but has sustained an exceptionally high availability rate and is expected to remain in service through the 2030s, thanks to a series of life-extension programs. But we cannot extend the current system beyond 2030, and that is why we are now developing its replacement—the ground based strategic deterrent. Doing so will require resources in a budget-constrained environment and, perhaps for that reason, we are hearing renewed calls to abandon the triad and cut our ICBM force. However, this step would be foolish and dangerous to the United States and to our allied security for several reasons.

First, ICBMs are highly reliable and always ready. That is why they are regarded as the most responsive leg of the triad. Unlike bombers and submarines, which may require time to arm or maneuver, the ICBM force provides the President the ability to promptly respond if deterrence fails. This virtue is often mischaracterized as a source of risk.

The system's rapid response is described as a "hair trigger" by critics who often paint chilling pictures of 400 ICBMs automatically flying to their

targets and causing Armageddon, either by accident or as a result of cyber interference.

I want to be clear that there is no “hair trigger” about our ICBMs. We have many safeguards put in place to ensure the system operates only as intended. For example, our ICBMs are actually targeted on the open-ocean spaces as a means of ensuring that, even if all of our safeguards failed and a missile somehow managed to launch by accident, it would land in the ocean and not accidentally start a nuclear war. The critics conveniently fail to mention this.

Former STRATCOM commander General Robert Kehler recently testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee, and he said: “It isn’t the same thing at all as thinking about a Wild West hair trigger It’s not the way it works.”

The high readiness of the ICBM force also provides an important hedge against uncertainty. Since we no longer maintain bombers on nuclear alert, the ICBMs and the submarines reinforce each other so that a technical failure in one leg of the triad does not render our day-to-day deterrent inoperative.

Those who advocate for doing away with the ICBM force must account for the fact that, under their proposals, in such moments there would not have been an additional leg of the triad to ensure our Nation isn’t left without a nuclear deterrent. As our nuclear forces continue to age, reliability challenges will only grow.

Critics often describe the ICBM force as being vulnerable, even going so far as to call our missiles sitting ducks. It is true that silos are not hidden, they aren’t mobile, and they can be targeted. But, again, this is a misunderstanding of what actually is the strength of the ICBM force.

In his testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, General Hyten stated that the ICBM force “creates the most significant targeting problem for an adversary, because there are 400 separate targets across the United States. All would have to be independently targeted by an adversary. That targeting problem is hugely problematic and creates a significant advantage for us.”

Simply put, destroying 400 hardened and geographically dispersed silos is an extremely difficult proposition. Only Russia possesses the capability to destroy our ICBM force. No other nation on Earth can do so, and it would greatly diminish Russia’s arsenal in the process. That is not a vulnerability. As General Hyten clearly states, it is a significant advantage for our Nation.

For these reasons and many others, Republican and Democratic administrations alike have maintained ICBMs as part of our nuclear forces for decades. The role of ICBMs has been reconsidered and reviewed many times, and their value has been repeatedly reaffirmed in a bipartisan manner. For

example, last November the report by the bipartisan National Defense Strategy Commission stated that the triad presents insurmountable targeting challenges for adversaries, imposes disproportionate costs on adversary defenses, and hedges against unforeseen geopolitical or technological changes.

Mr. President, I will close by saying that our ICBM forces make key contributions to our overall nuclear forces and, as Members on both sides of the aisle agree, they are an essential ingredient to the bedrock of our national security—our nuclear deterrent.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

VENEZUELA

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Good afternoon. The crisis in Venezuela is a crisis in America. Senator RUBIO, Congressman DIAZ-BALART, and I have been talking about this for years and worked with the White House on a comprehensive strategy. More than 200,000 Venezuelans live in Florida, and their concerns are our concerns.

Make no mistake—this is a crisis. It is a humanitarian crisis that threatens the lives of the people of Venezuela and has created a flood of refugees numbering in the millions. It is also a crisis that threatens the safety and security of our allies in Latin America and in the United States of America.

The dictatorship of Nicolas Maduro and the creeping influence and military presence of our global adversaries represent a clear and present danger to the entire Western Hemisphere. There are some who will say that this is not our fight, that the millions of Venezuelans suffering 2,000 miles away are not our concern. Some have criticized the mere mention of the crisis in Venezuela by those like myself as American imperialism or a U.S.-backed coup. I reject that. This is our fight. Freedom and democracy in Latin America is our fight. I remind these critics that the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing. We cannot let evil triumph in Venezuela. It would be a failure of leadership with disastrous consequences.

There is only one option left to get aid to the people of Venezuela. It is something that no one is willing to talk about. It is becoming clear that we will have to consider the use of American military assets to deliver aid. Maduro and his thugs have left us no choice.

I applaud President Trump and his administration for taking bold action by recognizing Juan Guaido as the legitimate President of Venezuela and organizing the international community to do the same. The sanctions implemented by this administration against the Maduro regime and its puppet masters in Havana reflect their commitment to freedom and democracy in Latin America. Yet Maduro remains in power, the people of Ven-

euela continue to suffer, and the influence of Cuba, Russia, China, and international terrorist organizations grows.

We must do more, but in order to understand where we go from here, we need to look at history. Hugo Chavez might have been elected democratically, but he never intended to govern democratically. He built a socialist dictatorship by hollowing out all the democratic institutions: the constitution, the electoral system, and the courts. He made civil society and the business sector bend to his will or face elimination. He nationalized entire sectors of the economy and used them to pay off his cronies. He took over the oil sector and made the national energy company his piggy bank. He made common cause with our enemies—most notably, the Castro regime. Cuba received and continues to receive free oil from Venezuela and in return provides political and internal security operatives. In other words, Cuba provided and is still providing military thugs to help stop freedom.

Chavez allowed his regime to engage in illicit trafficking of drugs and people. He cooperated with Middle Eastern terrorist organizations like Hezbollah and the terrorist state of Iran. This cooperation has only intensified under Chavez’s successor, Maduro.

The path of socialism chosen by the Chavistas inevitably led to a failed state that relies on bad actors for survival. The result is one of the worst humanitarian crises in our hemisphere’s history.

We cannot ignore the impact the socialist policies of Chavez and Maduro has had on the people of Venezuela. Nine out of ten households say they don’t have enough money to buy food. That is socialism. Eighty percent of children under 5 are in some state of malnutrition. That is socialism. Inflation is over 10 million percent this year, and their currency is worthless. What does that mean to the average person? A bundle of carrots costs 3 million bolivars. A dozen eggs costs \$150 USD. That is socialism. Venezuela has the highest murder rate in the world. That is socialism.

More than 3.5 million refugees—about 12 percent of the population—have fled to nearby countries because they can’t get food, water, medicine, or safety from their government. Two million more Venezuelans are expected to flee before the year is out, with Colombia taking the brunt of this refugee crisis. Colombian resources are strained, as they do all they can to help the refugees fleeing persecution, starvation, and sickness, while the Maduro regime blocks aid caravans, sets them on fire, and continues to cooperate with the narco-trafficking rebels that plague Colombia.

I want to thank my good friend President Duque for all he is doing. Other nations in the region, such as Brazil and Peru, have also chipped in, accepting hundreds of thousands of refugees.