

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 33.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Rodolfo Armando Ruiz II, of Florida, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Florida.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The bill 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 Rodolfo Armando Ruiz II, of Florida, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Florida.

Mitch McConnell, Deb Fischer, Mike Rounds, James E. Risch, John Thune, Rick Scott, James M. Inhofe, John Cornyn, John Hoeven, Pat Roberts, Tim Scott, Steve Daines, Richard Burr, John Boozman, Roy Blunt, Shelley Moore Capito, John Barrasso.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 34.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Raul M. Arias-Marxuach, of Puerto Rico, to be United States District Judge for the District of Puerto Rico.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The bill 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 Raul M. Arias-Marxuach, of Puerto Rico, to be United States District Judge for the District of Puerto Rico.

Mitch McConnell, Deb Fischer, Mike Rounds, James E. Risch, John Thune, Rick Scott, James M. Inhofe, John Cornyn, John Hoeven, Pat Roberts, Tim Scott, Steve Daines, Richard Burr, John Boozman, Roy Blunt, Shelley Moore Capito, John Barrasso.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 36.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Joshua Wolson, of Pennsylvania, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The bill 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 Joshua Wolson, of Pennsylvania, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

Mitch McConnell, David Perdue, Shelley Moore Capito, John Barrasso, John Boozman, Mike Crapo, Richard C. Shelby, Mike Rounds, John Cornyn, Roger F. Wicker, Pat Roberts, John Thune, John Hoeven, Roy Blunt, Marco Rubio, Tim Scott, Kevin Cramer.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls for the cloture motions be waived.

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

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

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

CONFIRMATION OF DAVID BERNHARDT

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, we just voted in a very important vote on the Senate floor—a bipartisan vote—to

confirm Mr. David Bernhardt as the next Secretary of the Interior for the United States of America. It was a strong vote—56 to 41.

I want to begin my remarks this afternoon by rising to express my gratitude and appreciation to Mr. Bernhardt for stepping up to the plate to continue to serve his country and to continue to serve the Department of the Interior now in the role of Secretary, the individual who is going to be running the Department of the Interior for the United States.

I thank my colleagues. It was a bipartisan vote in the Senate, which I think is important for voting for now-Secretary Bernhardt. Actually, I would like to be the first Senator to call him Secretary Bernhardt. If you and your family are watching, Mr. Secretary, thank you.

I also want to mention that I have been listening to some of the speeches made by my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. To be perfectly blunt, I find what we just witnessed a bit disheartening. I would like to say at the outset that we can and should disagree on policy disputes. Certainly issues like land issues are really important to me in my State, that is for sure. We can disagree about the direction of how we are going to move some of those policies forward. What is disheartening, though, is when you have someone like Mr. Bernhardt, who is willing to serve his country again—and I am going to talk about that—essentially getting his reputation dragged through the mud on the Senate floor. It is not a good thing. It doesn't encourage people to want to serve.

So, Mr. Secretary, thank you. I know this wasn't an easy confirmation process.

When you look at his background, this is actually one of the most qualified individuals to serve as the Secretary whom we have had in many years. He was the Solicitor General under President George W. Bush, confirmed by the Senate; he was the Deputy Secretary for the last 2 years, confirmed by this body; and now he is the Secretary. I would say those are very high qualifications. I just want to talk about him for a little bit.

Why do I support Mr. Bernhardt? The Secretary of the Department of the Interior is really important to America. It is critically important to my State, the great State of Alaska. We have over 200 million acres of land under the Department of the Interior's control in Alaska—200 million acres. That is over two times the size of California. In fact, one-quarter of all the lands that the Department of the Interior manages for the United States reside in Alaska. Let me repeat that. One-quarter of all the lands that the Secretary of the Interior manages in America are in my State.

So we take this role of Secretary of the Interior very, very seriously, which is why I wanted to come to the floor and again thank Secretary Bernhardt

and let him know that even though there were a lot of Senators down here really ripping into him, the vast majority of us—56 of us, at least—think he is going to do a great job.

Why do we think that, Mr. Secretary? Well, certainly with regard to Alaska, sometimes Secretaries of the Interior understand our State and that we are different and unique and that Federal laws passed by this body say so. Other Secretaries of the Interior don't. They don't understand that in Alaska you have to balance conservation with resource development and economic opportunity. Secretary Bernhardt does understand this, and this is refreshing. Secretary Zinke did. This was refreshing. It was a refreshing break from the previous administration, the Obama administration, where Secretaries of the Interior, like Sally Jewell, went out of their way to tilt Federal power in a way that disadvantaged the State of Alaska, despite Federal law saying you shouldn't do that.

Well, we just had a U.S. Supreme Court decision 2 weeks ago saying that that practice of the Department of the Interior and their different officials tilting the law against Alaskans had to stop. It was a huge case that I talked about on the floor last week, *Sturgeon v. Frost*, which says that in the laws of the Federal Government, particularly as they relate to Alaska—the Supreme Court stated it several times in a 9-to-0 opinion—Alaska is unique and Alaska is different. When it comes to the Department of the Interior, it is very different.

Well, Mr. Secretary Bernhardt knows that, and that is one of the reasons why I am so pleased to have voted for him and supported his confirmation, which we just saw on the Senate floor. It is not just me who supports him. Let me provide some quotes from letters and support groups, because, again, after listening to some of my colleagues the last couple of days, you would have thought that everybody was against him. Actually, most groups who care about conservation were for him. Let me give one really important group—the Alaska Federation of Natives, an extremely important group in my State. The Secretary of the Interior has trust responsibilities to lower 48 Indians and Alaska Natives. This group had this to say about Mr. Bernhardt:

He listens well. He is articulate in his responses. He draws reasonable conclusions. Moreover, he has established a trusting relationship with the Alaska Native community around the issues of resource development and subsistence hunting and fishing.

So they have been complimentary and supportive.

The American Farm Bureau says:

This President's nomination of David Bernhardt as Secretary of the Interior is great news for American agriculture. He understands the needs of America's farmers and ranchers and is an excellent choice for Interior Secretary.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies—who are they? Those are the

men and women in each State who manage fish and game like the Department of the Interior. Here is what they had to say:

The Association is appreciative of Mr. Bernhardt's continued support for the great work of state fish and wildlife agencies in conserving our nation's natural resources.

The Congressional Sportsmen Foundation says:

Mr. Bernhardt has demonstrated he is a true advocate for sportsmen and women across the country by working with the community throughout his career in natural resources management, and implementing Secretarial Orders that promote sportsmen's access to public lands.

That is a very big issue in my State. Even a group like Ducks Unlimited says: "His integrity in following the law is beyond reproach." Let me say that one again. "His integrity in following the law is beyond reproach." David Bernhardt is a champion of conservation and the right person for the job.

When I was the commissioner of natural resources in the great State of Alaska—which actually is a job similar to the Secretary of the Interior, where we manage an enormous portfolio of land, water, oil, gas, minerals, and timber—I had the opportunity to actually hire Mr. Bernhardt when he was in the private sector as an attorney helping the State of Alaska with a big complicated lands issue. He did a great job. He was a hard worker. He was a man of integrity. So the list goes on and on of the supporters.

So, again, Mr. Secretary, we just want you to know that given your background as former Solicitor of the Department of the Interior and former Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior and as someone who has gotten rave reviews from groups all across the country, and now as the Secretary of the Interior, my view is that you are actually one of the most qualified individuals to hold this position. So congratulations. You certainly earned it. We appreciate your service to this great Nation of ours, your service to the Department of the Interior, and your service to my State, the great State of Alaska, and we certainly look forward to working with you as you continue your public service for our country, for Interior, and for Alaska. I just wanted to come to the floor to commend you on a strong bipartisan support, and we are going to look forward to working with you.

TRIBUTE TO CYNTHIA ERICKSON

Mr. President, it is Thursday afternoon, and it is one of the times that I enjoy the most here in the Senate because it is the time when I get to come down to the floor and do a little bragging about my State and, most importantly, do a little bragging about the people who make Alaska such a wonderful place and such a unique place.

Now, we have all heard the stories about the grandeur, size, and beauty of the great State of Alaska, and they are all true, as you know. To anyone

watching, we would love for you to come on up for a visit. You will love it. It will be the best trip of your life. Right now, for example, what is happening in Alaska is that it is a wonderful time of the year. We are gaining sunlight every day. The snow is melting. The birds are beginning their huge migration back to Alaska. Some flowers are even starting to bloom in parts of the State. It is a wonderful and incredible time.

Like any State, and we all come down here and like to talk about our States, it is the people who truly make my State so special. It is generous people who work tirelessly day in and day out to help one another. So each week, I come down to the Senate floor and talk about one of these individuals, and I call that person "Alaskan of the Week."

Today, that person is a wonderful leader and a good friend of mine, Cynthia Erickson. As I mentioned, we live in a great State—great State to raise a family, build a good exciting life of service and meaning. But Alaska, like all States, has its share of challenges, and one of the biggest and most pernicious challenges in Alaska is that we, unfortunately, have some of the highest rates of domestic violence and sexual assault in the country—as a matter of fact, in a lot of categories, the highest, including child abuse.

Now, when I was attorney general, we made confronting this issue a very big priority. We are continuing to push these initiatives in the Senate. Just yesterday, Senator GILLIBRAND and I introduced a bill that would seek to change the culture around sexual assault and domestic violence through a national ad campaign. We called that bill the Choose Respect Act, and we introduced it yesterday. This is a bill that will be part of a whole series of bills focused on trying to bring respect to our country with regard to these issues. Stay tuned on that.

Here is a fact. We can do all of those kinds of important pieces of legislation here in the Senate on these kinds of critical issues, but as I think we all know that it is really the work done on the ground by members of the community and the grassroots that ultimately has the biggest and most lasting impact on these critical issues—the biggest and most lasting impact on changing the culture that we need to change, not just in Alaska but in the country, on these issues of abuse and domestic violence.

I am happy to say that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of people across my State—heroes all, no doubt—who have banded together using their passion, creativity, and energy to be there for victims and survivors and to help them break out of cycles of violence that often can be generational cycles.

Let's talk about one of those heroes, a very special woman, Cynthia Erickson, and today's Alaskan of the Week, who has spent countless hours