

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE
CALENDAR

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I appreciate the recognition. I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Foreign Relations be discharged and the Senate proceed to the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: PN1938, PN2024, PN2101, PN2030, and PN2025; that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table en bloc and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, first of all, let me say to my dear friend from New Jersey, I fully agree with the five nominees he has put in front of the Senate. Indeed, we had good confirmation hearings on all five of those, and none of these five—other than the one I am going to the talk about in a second—are political appointments. These are career people who have had long and distinguished service with the Secretary of State, and they are all very legitimate appointees to the places they are appointed to, which I am going to reiterate here in just a minute.

In any event, one was left off the list. I know Senator BOOKER had some issues with that, but I think, in the spirit of cooperation and in the spirit of bipartisanship, he offers five, and I will offer a compromise of one more. I think that is absolutely fair—five for one.

But I object, and indeed I would ask unanimous consent that we do as suggested by Senator BOOKER, and that is discharge from the committee and approve the following six nominations: PN1938, Mr. Kevin Blackstone, Class of Minister-Counselor, to be Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste; PN2024, Ms. Cynthia Kierscht, Class of Counselor, to be Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania; PN2101, Mr. Brian D. McFeeters, Class of Minister-Counselor, to be Ambassador to Malaysia; PN2025, the Honorable Geeta Pasi, Class of Career Minister, to be Ambassador to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; PN2030, the Honorable David Reimer, Class of Counselor, to be Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone; and finally, William E. Todd, PN1598, to be Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

As I said, none of these are political. They have all had long and distinguished careers with the State Department. They all have great backgrounds to be Ambassadors, and I appreciate Senator BOOKER helping me move all six of these forward.

With that, I ask unanimous consent that all six of those be discharged and be considered and passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senator so modify?

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I just want to say I appreciate my friend and my colleague, and truly, when he invoked the spirit of cooperation and the spirit of bipartisanship, I felt lucky that he didn't invoke the spirit of Christmas as well.

Mr. RISCH. I would like to amend.

Mr. BOOKER. But I do want to let him know that, indeed, the five people are nonpolitical individuals with the State Department. I wish we could just move them and get confirmed. But I do have an objection to the sixth that he would seek to add, so I will not modify my request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the original request?

Mr. RISCH. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, it is good to see you in that seat, sir. The post of Ambassador to Pakistan is one that is highly relevant to American national securities, as I think all 100 of us understand. The person selected to implement the U.S. foreign policy and engage diplomatically with the Pakistani Government must be someone who understands that American-Pakistani relationship and the complex and evolving challenges to regional stability in South Asia. That person must also be someone who can be trusted by the American people and by their colleagues at the State Department to carry out U.S. foreign policy decisions.

Unfortunately, there is a disturbing and documented pattern of behavior from Mr. Todd that I believe makes him unqualified to serve as our Ambassador to Pakistan.

From 2017 to 2019, Mr. Todd served in a variety of management positions at the State Department, including as Acting Director General and Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and as Acting Under Secretary for Management.

During that time, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee opened investigations into allegations that senior State Department officials, including Mr. Todd, were engaging in prohibited personnel practices against other members of the State Department's career workforce.

As a result of these investigations, multiple State Department officials told the committees that the administration wanted to punish career officials at the State Department often for doing their jobs, for following procedures and protocols, and also punish them for just raising concerns about policies that they believed sincerely would be dangerous or deleterious to American interests.

Mr. Todd was one of the people political appointees turned to to help carry out a lot of those actions. When asked about those allegations in the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, it was reported clearly that he was unreasonably agitated, even raising his voice

when asked about just these routine issues.

The incoming administration has an enormous task. We know the challenges in that region. In the entire State Department, there have been challenges as well. We should give that new administration a chance and not promote someone for what is a really critical ambassadorship in a very complex and challenging region. We need to make sure that we have someone prominent in the role who can command the confidence of State Department officials, and that, in many ways, gives the incoming administration a chance to deal with that vacancy, which has been, I will note, vacant for 2 years without a nomination.

He clearly does not have the temperament or the track record of standing up for his own employees or for the institution of the State Department.

We should be doing everything in our power to restore credibility to American leadership, not just overall in the world stage, which I know we all agree on, but also in that region, and work to repair a lot of the harm that this individual may have been involved in creating that hurt morale so much.

I have a lot of confidence in the chairman's leadership. We have a committee that often works in a bipartisan manner, and I am grateful for that. It is one of the pleasures I have in serving in the Senate. This role is critical to the country—the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan. Ambassador Hale left the post in September of 2018, and it was a year before the administration nominated someone to the post. So, again, I just find it, on top of my previous remarks, odd that the chairman and others are now saying that we need this Ambassador now. I believe that is not the case, and I believe that there hasn't been an urgency from the administration to fill this ambassadorship until today.

So it is for these reasons that I oppose Mr. Todd's nomination, and I hope that my colleague will move the other five. They are deserving Foreign Service officers and should be confirmed. They should not be held up because of objections to the nominee we have been discussing.

So we agree on these five nominees. I truly urge my colleague that we should not obstruct them because of our differences over one. There is a true urgency, I believe, in this season to get what we can agree on done, and disagreement rooted as substantially as I believe this one is should not hold up the other ones. That is why I think the nominees to Ethiopia, Mauritania, Malaysia, and Sierra Leone—I do really believe they should be confirmed today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, I thank Senator BOOKER for his kind words about the committee. I want to commit that we will continue to work in a

bipartisan fashion. On the other hand, we have a disagreement here regarding this particular person. He is a well-qualified career State Department nominee. He has been nominated, of course, to be Ambassador of Pakistan. Ambassador Todd is a career member of senior executive service. He is well qualified to serve as the Ambassador. He is currently serving as the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Management. He has a wealth of experience, having previously served as Ambassador twice, to Cambodia and Brunei.

His qualifications notwithstanding, now is really not the time to leave the ambassadorship and the mission in Islamabad vacant.

The others we have are also good. I don't think that it is unfair to ask that we have a trade of five for one.

In any event, we respectfully disagree at this point. I have no doubt, as we move forward, we will have other things we do agree on, but at this time, I am going to continue to object to the five.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to discuss critical parts of today's funding bill that is before us this week. These are the result of bipartisan work that we have done. And the Presiding Officer is a member of the Environment and Public Works Committee, a valued member who has contributed significantly to the legislation before us.

As chairman of that committee, I am so grateful for your participation because I am going to talk about some things that we have been able to do on the Environment and Public Works Committee together and in a bipartisan way. You have done such a remarkable job with the Save Our Seas legislation, and we continue to support that.

Now I am going to talk about a couple of additional things that are part of this end-of-the-year legislation that we will be voting on later this evening.

The first is historic, bipartisan climate innovation legislation. The second is comprehensive legislation to upgrade America's water infrastructure. So I want to talk about two different things: One is the climate innovation legislation and then what is commonly known as the WRDA bill, the Water Resources Development Act. Both of these measures passed the committee with unanimous bipartisan support.

The Republicans and Democrats on this committee have worked together to reduce emissions and to do it through innovation—not taxation, not regulation, but do it through innovation—free market innovation, not punishing government regulations. I believe that is the best way to go as we address the challenges of our environment and our climate.

We have reached a historic agreement in the committee, and we will on the floor tonight in the Senate, to in-

clude environmental innovation provisions in this government funding bill.

The environmental innovation agreements include three specific bills that will significantly reduce greenhouse gases. I have had the privilege of working closely with my friend, the committee ranking member, TOM CARPER from Delaware, on each of these three.

The first is called the USE IT Act. This legislation ensures that Washington is a willing partner in the research and the development of carbon capture technologies and projects. Carbon capture holds the key to significant carbon emission reductions. These captured emissions can be used to create building materials, medical supplies, even clothing. They can also be used to extract more natural resources to provide more energy for all of us.

The USE IT Act is going to expedite permitting so that important carbon capture projects can get moving. It supports the research and the use of carbon capture. It includes direct air capture—actually, carbon dioxide from the atmosphere—that will take carbon emissions straight out of the air. It is very innovative.

This kind of research is now already happening in my home State of Wyoming, in Gillette, WY, at the Integrated Test Center, which is associated with the University of Wyoming School of Energy Resources.

I have worked closely with Senators WHITEHOUSE and CAPITO and CARPER on the USE IT Act in having it passed, first, through our committee, then through the full Senate, and tonight, in a bill that will be ultimately sent to the President of the United States for his signature.

The second measure, part of this innovative work, is a bill sponsored by Ranking Member CARPER to reauthorize the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act.

This program has already significantly reduced the amount of black carbon in our air by replacing older engines in buses—school buses and trucks and other vehicles. This is working well. These replacement engines make diesel equipment cleaner and more efficient.

The legislation that we will reauthorize this evening sees that this important program will then continue all the way through the end of 2024.

The last element of our bipartisan agreement will phase down the use of chemicals known as HFCs. These chemicals are in every home in America, from cars to refrigerators to air conditioners.

This agreement is going to authorize a 15-year phasedown on the production of these chemicals. Innovative breakthroughs in chemistry have led to the development of cleaner replacement chemicals. This legislation tonight will help protect our air while keeping costs down for the American people.

Importantly, the agreement, the bipartisan agreement we have come up with, safeguards the essential use of

HFC chemicals when substitute chemicals are less effective. Some examples including bear spray. We use it in Wyoming. I know they use it in Alaska. It protects hikers. It is also used in fire suppression systems on planes that protect travelers. And we need it.

I know in my hometown of Casper, the defense spray manufacturer, the Safariland Group, employs about 75 people. They use HFC chemicals to make defense sprays. It is a critically important part of their business.

If they were forced to use replacement chemicals, those sprays would be far less effective. Well, if you are around a bear, you want to make sure you have the most effective spray available. So with the changes we have negotiated into this important bill, companies like the Safariland Group will be able to continue making high-quality products that people want and people need and that can save their lives.

We also made sure that the manufacturers using these chemicals have a clear set of rules to go by—one clear set of rules to go by. So our agreement preempts State and local laws to ensure that the specific essentials that are being used are protected.

Now the manufacturers won't have to deal with different sets of rules in different States, which has been a real problem. This clears that up. The end result is clean air and clear rules. We need both of those.

I really want to thank Ranking Member CARPER, Senator JOHN KENNEDY of Louisiana for working with me to reach an agreement that will reduce the use of HFC chemicals while protecting consumers and manufacturers alike.

All of these three measures support market innovation. All three will reduce greenhouse gases, and they will do it in ways that will not harm the economy.

The government funding bill that we are going to be addressing a little later this evening also includes bipartisan water infrastructure legislation. I know in the Presiding Officer's home State of Alaska and in my home State of Wyoming, water is critical, as it is across the entire country. But you and I have focused specifically on this.

Certainly, in Wyoming, dams, levees, ports, reservoirs, and water systems are important to every community all across the country. The infrastructure is critical. People say the word is "infrastructure," but when we think about it, what it really means is dams, ports, reservoirs, levees, and water systems. That really, I think, shows more what we are talking about than just this overall word "infrastructure."

It protects all of us from dangerous floods and storms, while also providing water for our families and our farms.

The government spending bill tonight includes the Water Resources Development Act of 2020. It is the result of months of negotiations between committee leaders from the Senate and the House of Representatives.