

And if you think this is all old news, just last month, I raised new allegations obtained by my office about potential contract irregularities at VA. It appears from public records that the VA has awarded lucrative contracts to former VA officials who resigned under ethical clouds. We need answers to that and all the other questions I have raised, and I will not stop pushing for those answers. My staff counts over 30 questions that VA to date has not fully responded to, after six oversight inquiries from my office and multiple attempts to gain their cooperation.

Mr. Jacobs, the nominee before us today, served as a senior adviser to various VA Secretaries and was there as the VA obstructed my inquiry. He had a front row seat at VA through a string of failures and crises, from the Phoenix wait list scandal, to VA's failures in processing claims for victims of sexual trauma, veterans' claims backlogs, delays in the GI Bill modernization initiative, and a host of challenges and scandals.

Mr. Jacobs has never adequately explained his role in these matters or what potential role he may have played in VA's lack of responsiveness to congressional inquiries. In addition, for reasons I explained in my public hold statement on his nomination March 14, I found his responses to my questions for the record to be woefully inadequate and evasive. Where is the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee in making sure the VA and this nominee are held accountable? After 2 years of that same pattern from the VA, the Senate should not confirm this nominee. VA can and must do better in responding to congressional inquiries and fulfilling its role of serving veterans and the American people. I will vote no.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative 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 Executive Calendar No. 64, Joshua David Jacobs, of Washington, to be Under Secretary for Benefits of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Charles E. Schumer, Raphael G. Warnock, Ben Ray Lujan, Tammy Duckworth, Jeff Merkley, Tim Kaine, Christopher A. Coons, Debbie Stabenow, Jon Tester, Sheldon Whitehouse, Tina Smith, Tammy Baldwin, Catherine Cortez Masto, Angus S. King, Jr., Mazie Hirono, John W. Hickenlooper, Margaret Wood Hassan.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Joshua David Jacobs, of Washington,

to be Under Secretary for Benefits of the Department of Veterans Affairs, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN) and the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) are necessarily absent.

Mr. McCONNELL. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Wyoming (Mr. BARRASSO), the Senator from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN), the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. HAGERTY), and the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 72, nays 22, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 95 Ex.]

YEAS—72

Baldwin	Graham	Padilla
Bennet	Hassan	Peters
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Reed
Booker	Hickenlooper	Romney
Boozman	Hirono	Rosen
Britt	Hoeven	Rounds
Brown	Hyde-Smith	Schatz
Budd	Johnson	Schumer
Cantwell	Kaine	Shaheen
Capito	Kelly	Sinema
Cardin	Kennedy	Smith
Carper	King	Stabenow
Casey	Klobuchar	Tester
Cassidy	Lujan	Thune
Collins	Manchin	Tillis
Coons	Markey	Tuberville
Cortez Masto	Marshall	Van Hollen
Cotton	Menendez	Warner
Cramer	Merkley	Warnock
Cruz	Moran	Warren
Duckworth	Murkowski	Welch
Durbin	Murphy	Whitehouse
Fetterman	Murray	Wyden
Gillibrand	Ossoff	Young

NAYS—22

Braun	Lankford	Schmitt
Cornyn	Lee	Scott (FL)
Crapo	Lummis	Scott (SC)
Daines	McConnell	Sullivan
Ernst	Mullin	Vance
Fischer	Paul	Wicker
Grassley	Ricketts	
Hawley	Rubio	

NOT VOTING—6

Barrasso	Feinstein	Risch
Blackburn	Hagerty	Sanders

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WARNOCK). On this vote, the yeas are 72, the nays are 22.

The motion is agreed to.

The Senator from New Jersey.

DIVERSITY IN BROADCASTING

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I come to the floor to highlight what I consider to be a grave injustice, and I urge us to do something about it. I do so because I remain deeply concerned about an issue that often flies under the radar, which is our Nation's severe lack of diversity when it comes to broadcast station ownership.

Three years ago, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights published a report titled "The Abysmal State of Media Ownership Diversity in America." That is an apt title, especially because, according to the Federal Communications Commission—the Agency responsible for regulating broadcasters—minorities in America make up less than 3 percent of all

broadcast station owners. For women, the numbers aren't much better. They account for less than 6 percent of all station owners.

These abysmal figures from the FCC—consistently in the single digits—are unacceptable. They are an affront to the incredible diversity that makes America the exceptional Nation that it is. And simply put, we do ourselves an enormous disservice when the vast majority of TV and radio stations in America are predominantly owned by White men. This lack of diversity in broadcasting is a problem that materially affects the people I represent in New Jersey.

Even as trusted sources of local news continue to be decimated, broadcast media stations play a crucial role in educating the public. They are an invaluable source of information, a safe harbor, particularly for minority communities at a time when new consumers continue to be bombarded with misinformation and disinformation.

Very often—speaking in one element of the Hispanic community—radio is what the community turns to in the case of an emergency. During the pandemic, it is where they turned to to get trusted information about how to take care of themselves and their families. In storms, tornadoes, and hurricanes, they are the preferred entity.

So all of us in this Chamber have a duty to be responsible stewards of the public airwaves, and we do this by ensuring that the ownership of stations reflects the audiences they reach. When minority communities turn on the radio and the television, the programming should be about events in their community, very possibly in a language they understand, speaking about a culture they know, and addressing issues they care about the most. We can only achieve this by having broadcast station leaders with similar life experiences to their listeners and viewers alike.

Make no mistake, if we hope to raise the appalling numbers of minority-owned broadcast stations in America, it starts with seizing every opportunity in front of us to increase their ranks.

It is long past time that the regulators at the Federal Communications Commission prioritize diversity in broadcast ownership.

Right now, the FCC has before it the case of Soo Kim, a Korean-American entrepreneur who has applied to acquire TEGNA Broadcasting. Should the deal go through, it would make TEGNA the largest minority-owned broadcast station group in the country. However, for more than a year, this deal has been in limbo.

I am not here to speak about all the details of this deal or the pros and cons of its merits, but basic fairness dictates that the FCC should make a decision one way or another and not just veto it through, in essence, inaction. That is not the American way. A vote is a fair shot and a way to see how the Commission will react to diversity issues when they become available.

Diversity, for me, means the fullness of diversity. It means African Americans. It means Hispanic Americans. It means women. It means LGBTQ Americans. And, yes, it means Asian Americans.

We need the FCC Commissioners to commit to increasing diversity in media ownership not just in words but with actions. I, for one, will not support nominees for the FCC if they are unwilling to support diversity, including by acting in a way that denies a vote to a diverse applicant. They cannot argue that broadcast station owners should reflect their audiences, publicly saying—this is the FCC—“We need to do better.” Well, that is great. Then you miss the opportunities to expand diversity in broadcasting when it is before you.

In the past, I have tried to address this issue head on through legislation. I will continue to follow that route as well.

Last Congress, alongside Senator PETERS, I introduced a bill, the Broadcast VOICES Act, that would help address the lack of diversity in the industry through innovations in our Tax Code. Through a Federal tax incentive, our bill would ensure that women- and minority-owned stations can compete on a level playing field to provide a benefit to audiences.

It would reestablish a program in order to reincentivize broadcast ownership. I say “reincentivize” because Congress has actually done this before. During the nearly two decades that this tax incentive as outlined in the Broadcast VOICES Act was active, minority ownership and diversity in the broadcast media industry grew fivefold. It grew fivefold. So think about where it was when I referred to the earlier percentages and where we are today. This tax provision helped increase it from virtually nothing to fivefold. That is right—the number of minority owners quintupled when the incentive was in place.

So make no mistake, the task in front of us is clear. Government regulators at the FCC have identified that there is a diversity problem in broadcast ownership. As I have said, there are steps this body can take to address it through the Broadcast VOICES Act, but the FCC has its share of the burden as well. It must more than talk the talk; it must walk the walk on the issue of diversity in media ownership.

I pushed for diverse candidates at every Agency. I will continue to do so. I am hopeful that the administration seizes the opportunity before them to nominate a diverse candidate to the Federal Communications Commission because part of taking proactive steps on industry diversity is ensuring that the regulator itself is more diverse.

My first question to any FCC nominee I meet will be “What actions will you take, if confirmed, to expand diversity in broadcast ownership?” If they are a present FCC Commissioner seeking to be reestablished at the Com-

mission, voted on again to return to the Commission: “What actions have you taken to expand diversity in broadcast ownership?”

Only if we as Members press this issue will things change. It is time to afford our communities the representation in media they deserve, not just representation that others think they deserve.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

TRIBUTE TO JEANNE KOHL-WELLES

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise today to honor and congratulate Mrs. Jeanne Kohl-Welles on her retirement following 30 years of work in elected office. Jeanne retires from Washington’s King County Council, where she has served as vice chair of the council and chair of the committee of the whole and been an extraordinary asset to our State and the greater Seattle-King County region for the last 30 years.

Under Jeanne’s leadership, King County Council was able to address countless issues facing King County and its communities. From supporting our communities through the COVID pandemic by leveraging the 13 budgets she passed as budget chair, to leading the creation of the King County Regional Homeless Authority, Jeanne has been dauntless in facing down tough challenges, tackling complex problems head on to make meaningful progress for King County and its communities.

Jeanne’s devotion to King County and the State of Washington as a whole started long before her tenure on the county council. Jeanne spent over two decades in the Washington State Legislature, first in the house and then in the senate. For many of her 20 years in the Washington State Senate, Jeanne chaired the senate higher education and labor and commerce committees and led legislative efforts to legalize medical marijuana and same-sex marriage, tackle income and gender inequality, and address human trafficking and child sexual abuse. Before that, she was an early advocate for addressing hate crimes and homelessness in Seattle.

A constant theme in Jeanne’s work has been her tireless dedication to truly representing her constituents. Jeanne has organized many Women’s History Month panels; expanded access to ballot drop boxes; implemented crucial investments in youth education; and worked with constituents count-

less times to introduce legislation that matters to them, like when she worked with middle-schoolers on legislation to regulate puppy-mills. Jeanne has shown a truly exceptional ability to champion what is important to those she represents. Whether it was pushing for the construction of the current stadium for our Seattle Seahawks, sponsoring legislation to make transit safe and available to all, or securing funding for the preservation of Washington State history—from Pike Place Market to the National Historic Landmark vessel S.S. *Virginia*—time and again, Jeanne has fought for the rights, needs, and histories of Washington State and King County communities.

Being a woman in politics isn’t always easy; when I first got to the Senate, there wasn’t even a women’s bathroom off the Senate floor. Every day, we are having to fight for our most basic rights, even as we advocate for all of our constituents. But every day, women like Jeanne are setting an example for young girls that with hard work, they can follow their dreams and make a real difference. Jeanne’s retirement won’t be a quiet one; she has plans to not only spend more time with her family and travel, but also to pursue other passions.

It has been a great privilege to work with Jeanne, a true trailblazer, over the last three decades. And it is my honor to thank her for her lifetime of dedicated service to people in King County, the State of Washington, and the entire country. I wish her the very best during her well-earned retirement.

TRIBUTE TO JOE McDERMOTT

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise today to honor and congratulate Mr. Joe McDermott on his retirement following 22 years of public service. Joe retires from Washington’s King County Council, where he has represented King County’s eighth district and been an extraordinary asset to our State and the greater Seattle-King County region for his many years in both the Washington State Senate and House of Representatives.

Upon joining the State legislature in 2001, Joe marked the first time more than one openly gay legislator would serve in it. During his time, he contributed to unprecedented progress for the LGBTQ+ community through the addition of sexual orientation and gender identity to our State’s antidiscrimination statutes and protections for transgender persons to our hate crime statutes, as well as recognition to domestic partnerships for same-sex couples. Joe’s contributions have forever broadened the civil rights bill and paved the way to marriage equality.

Joe has also been a pivotal leader in safeguarding public safety. As a councilmember, Joe responded to the public health crisis of gun violence by recognizing the necessity of responsible firearm policy with the 2018 King County Gun Safety Action Plan. As