

BUSINESS MEETING

Wednesday, November 20, 2019

U.S. SENATE

Committee on Environment and Public Works

Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:39 a.m., in room 406, Dirksen Senate Building, the Honorable John Barrasso [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Senators Barrasso, Carper, Inhofe, Capito, Braun, Rounds, Boozman, Ernst, Cardin, Merkley, Gillibrand, Van Hollen.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JOHN BARRASSO, A UNITED STATES
SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF WYOMING

Senator Barrasso. Good morning. I call this business meeting to order.

Today we are going to consider one nomination. Senator Carper and I have agreed that we will vote at 9:45, and it is six minutes away. At that time, I will call up the nomination on the agenda. We will not debate the nomination on the agenda while we vote. Instead, we will debate the nomination on the agenda before we vote. I will also be happy to recognize any member who wishes to speak after the voting concludes.

We are going to consider the nomination of Sean O'Donnell to be the Inspector General of the Environmental Protection Agency. The full committee held a hearing on the nominee last month. Mr. O'Donnell is well qualified and will bring a wealth of experience and expertise to this critically important position.

I applaud President Trump's nomination on such an experienced and dedicated public servant. The Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Inspector General currently lacks Senate confirmed leadership. Mr. O'Donnell has the right experience to fill the void.

For nearly 20 years, Mr. O'Donnell has devoted his career to public service. Since 2005, he has served as a trial

attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice. He has handled criminal and civil matters, such as those relating to financial and government program fraud and public corruption.

Mr. O'Donnell is familiar with the use of sophisticated investigative and forensic tools. He has managed large investigative teams of attorneys, of analysts, and investigators. And he has worked with agents and auditors from half a dozen offices of inspectors general.

Mr. O'Donnell has received numerous honors and awards for his work at the Department of Justice. In 2017, he received the Attorney General's Award for Distinguished Service, the second highest honor awarded by the department. That year, he also received the Executive Office for United States Attorneys Director's Award for Superior Performance by a Litigative Team. During the Obama Administration, he received a Civil Division Special Achievement Award and numerous annual quality service awards.

Mr. O'Donnell's background and experience make him an exceptional candidate to serve as the Environmental Protection Agency's Inspector General. I urge all my colleagues to support his nomination, and I will now turn to the Ranking Member for his statement.

[The prepared statement of Senator Barrasso follows:]

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE THOMAS R. CARPER, A UNITED STATES
SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF DELAWARE

Senator Carper. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning. We have, as the Chairman said, one item on our agenda today, and that is to vote on the nomination of Sean O'Donnell to be Inspector General of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. As we know, the EPA has been without a confirmed Inspector General for over a year now. I believe all of us here today agree that this is a job that is far too important to be vacant for this long. So I am glad we are gathered here today to vote on Mr. O'Donnell's nomination.

As I said at his confirmation hearing, Mr. O'Donnell has a big job ahead of him. That bears repeating, because the EPA's mission is, "To protect human health and the environment." In order for the EPA to fulfill that critical mission, the agency itself must be protected from misconduct or unethical behavior that could impair it. That oversight responsibility falls in no small part on the EPA Inspector General.

I had the privilege of meeting with Mr. O'Donnell privately. Staff and I have listened to his testimony before this committee. We have reviewed his answers to the committee's questions, and ultimately, I have concluded that Mr. O'Donnell is well qualified to serve as the EPA Inspector General.

I was encouraged by Mr. O'Donnell's clear commitment to

continue investigations into alleged violations of government ethics rules by political leaders, even if those leaders have resigned their positions. Unfortunately, that did not occur with all the investigations into former Administrator Pruitt's deeply unethical behavior. And Mr. O'Donnell also promised to protect the integrity of internal and oversight functions within the EPA, especially when EPA's dedicated career staff are put into the untenable position of having to oversee or call out improper activities of senior political appointees.

In recent weeks, we have seen why it is so important for the EPA Inspector General to be clear about the information it needs, and that EPA officials are cooperative and responsive in return. While I am hopeful that the current dispute between the EPA's chief of staff and the acting inspector general will be resolved to everyone's satisfaction before Mr. O'Donnell is confirmed, the dispute illustrates the importance of the role that Mr. O'Donnell is willing to perform.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to a brief business this morning. I want to thank you, along with our colleagues and members of their staffs for all your work to make this meeting both swift and productive. Thanks so much.

[The prepared statement of Senator Carper follows:]

Senator Barrasso. Thank you very much, Senator Carper.

Now that enough members have arrived, I would like to move to a vote on the nominee of today's agenda. The Ranking Member and I have agreed to a voice vote on the nominee, and members may choose to have their votes recorded for the nominee after the voice vote, if they have additional concerns. I would be happy to listen as well, and keep the meeting going as long as people want to comment on the nominee.

I would like to call up Presidential Nomination 1158, Sean O'Donnell, of Maryland, to be Inspector General of the Environmental Protection Agency. I move to approve and report the nomination favorably to the Senate. Is there a second?

Senator Carper. I second.

Senator Barrasso. All those in favor, please say aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Senator Barrasso. All those opposed, please say nay.

[No audible response.]

Senator Barrasso. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it. We have approved Presidential Nominee 1158, which will be reported favorably to the Senate.

The voting part of the meeting is finished. I would be happy to recognize any other members who wish to speak or make a statement on the nomination that we have just approved.

I do ask unanimous consent that the staff have authority to

make technical and conforming changes to the matter approved today.

Seeing no one seeking recognition, the business meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 9:46 a.m., the business meeting was concluded.]