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U.S. Senate

Date: Tuesday, June 4, 2019

Committee on Environment
and Public Works

Washington, D.C.

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HEARING ON THE NOMINATION OF ROBERT WALLACE TO BE ASSISTANT
SECRETARY FOR FISH, WILDLIFE, AND PARKS AT THE DEPARTMENT OF
INTERIOR

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The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:05 a.m. in room 406, Dirksen Senate Office Building, the Honorable John Barrasso [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Senators Barrasso, Carper, Cramer, Braun, Rounds, Sullivan, Ernst, Cardin, Whitehouse, Markey, Van Hollen.

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

Senator Barrasso. Good morning. I call this hearing to order.

Today we will consider the nomination of Rob Wallace to be Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks at the Department of the Interior. Once confirmed, he will oversee the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service. His confirmation will be especially important, as neither of these agencies have Senate-confirmed leadership at this time. He will play a central role in managing fish and wildlife for the American public. That includes combatting invasive species, recovering endangered species, protecting migratory birds, restoring fisheries, and conserving and enhancing wildlife habitat.

I have known Rob Wallace for over 35 years. Without question, Rob is the right person for this job. Throughout his long and distinguished career, Rob has struck the proper balance between wildlife conservation, habitat management, and the use of our public lands. Rob's experience and leadership in Wyoming and in our Nation's capital are ideally suited for this critically important position.

Throughout his 45-year career, Rob has served in a variety of jobs that directly relate to the two federal agencies that he

is being nominated to oversee. Rob began his career as a seasonal park ranger in Grand Teton National Park. Since then, Rob has served as Assistant Director of the National Park Service, as Chief of Staff for Wyoming Senator Malcolm Wallop, as Staff Director of the United States Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, as Chief of Staff for Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer, and as manager of U.S. Government Relations for GE Energy.

Rob currently serves as President of the Upper Green River Conservancy, the Nation's first cooperative conservation bank. Rob co-founded the Upper Green River Conservancy to protect core sage grouse habitat in the ecologically and energy-rich upper Green River Watershed in Southwest Wyoming. He built an innovative partnership of ranchers, conservation groups, energy companies, investors and other stakeholders.

Rob is also a founding member of the board of the Grand Teton National Park Foundation, which promotes the park's cultural, historic and natural resources. He is a member of the board of the Jackson Hole Land Trust, which protects open spaces, wildlife habitat, and working lands across northwest Wyoming.

In addition, Rob serves as a member of the University of Wyoming's Energy Resources Council. The Council sets priorities for energy-related academics, research and outreach. He has

also served on the boards of numerous organizations dedicated to conserving wildlife and enhancing our national parks.

With credentials like these, it is no surprise that stakeholders from across the political spectrum have enthusiastically endorsed Rob's nomination. Dan Ashe, the former Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service during the Obama Administration, and now the President and now the President of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, wrote, "I have a good context for what creates success in this important and challenging position: a passion for the mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service." He goes on to say, "An appreciation and admiration for the people who do the work, a penchant for listening, and a dedication to inclusive problem-solving." He concludes by saying, "In my view, Rob displays all of these crucial characteristics."

Richie Jones, the State Director for the Nature Conservancy in Delaware, also endorsed Rob's nomination. He has also received the support of over 40 environmental, conservation, and recreational organizations, including the National Parks Conservation Association, the National Wildlife Refuge Association, the Public Lands Council, Ducks Unlimited, American Sportfishing Association, Congressional Sportsmen Foundation, and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.

Confirming Rob is important to the work of this committee.

The Environment and Public Works Committee has jurisdiction over fish and wildlife policy, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Earlier this year, Congress enacted the Wildlife Innovation and Longevity Driver Act, also known as the WILD Act. We did so to combat invasive species, to prevent wildlife poaching and trafficking, to promote wildlife conservation and to protect endangered species.

So I look forward to working with Rob to implement the WILD Act. I am in the process of developing legislation to modernize the Endangered Species Act. I continue to engage with State fish and wildlife agencies, environmental groups, conservation organizations, ranchers, farmers, energy producers, and others from across the political spectrum. I hope to gain their support and ultimately the support of a bipartisan group of Senators for a bill that modernizes the Endangered Species Act so it works better for species and for people.

Rob demonstrated to the Upper Green River Conservancy that it is possible to build such a coalition, focused on solving the problems of the Endangered Species Act. So I look forward to working with him on modernizing this important law.

Rob Wallace is an outstanding choice for the position of Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. I look forward to moving his nomination expeditiously through the confirmation process.

I will now turn to Ranking Member Carper for his opening 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 very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Wallace, welcome. I want to welcome you and your daughters this morning.

Also, I would like to welcome Senator Mike Enzi, one of our favorite colleagues. I listened to the Chairman's opening statement, it sounds like you have his support, and Mike Enzi's support, Dan Ashe's support, Richie Jones' support from Delaware, a whole host, like a Who's Who of organizations here that represent and look after the fish and wildlife, endangered species and habitat protection, conservation. This is one of those deals where you may just want to ask somebody to make a motion, and we just vote.

Senator Barrasso. So moved.

[Laughter.]

Senator Carper. We can all take an early lunch.

Seriously, we appreciate your willingness to do this. It is always great to have Mike Enzi in the room, and we appreciate your family being here, too. We appreciate your willingness to serve in this role as Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. I think it has to be a great job. Of all the jobs you could have, this has to be one of the best.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service are two agencies that, as we know, play critical roles in managing and protecting our Nation's most treasured natural resources and public lands. I am sure you will agree, given your experience as a park ranger, as a youngster, and as someone who has lived a life that I think you can be proud of.

In Delaware, we are extremely proud of our two national wildlife refuges, and one of the Country's newest national parks, the First State National Historical Park. Our refuges are home to threatened and endangered species, and people from all over the world travel to Delaware to visit these refuges, as well as our national park.

Overseeing these agencies and beloved public lands is no small task, but one that you seem prepared for, and I believe are passionate about. I especially appreciate the statement in your testimony, and this is a quote from you, "Bipartisan solutions are always the lasting ones. Those are words of wisdom."

I could not agree more. And I hope that we will be able to count on you to bring that balanced approach to the Administration's Department of the Interior.

Unfortunately, having said that, unfortunately, the Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in particular have taken actions in the last couple of years that could

jeopardize our Nation's wildlife without bipartisan support from members of Congress. Specifically, the Administration has proposed regulation that could dramatically alter implementation of the Endangered Species Act, one of our Nation's most popular and effective environmental laws. These regulations could undermine the science that is supposed to drive species protection decisions.

This Administration has also adopted an unprecedented legal opinion relative to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, a stance that former top Fish and Wildlife Service officials from both Republican and Democratic administrations have vehemently opposed. What is more, the Trump Administration has reassigned dozens of Department of Interior senior executive service employees without good reasons, which is reportedly creating a culture of fear within the Department. Surpassing the expertise of career public servants is an injustice to natural resources that the Department is tasked with managing.

All of these actions, along with a number of others, are deeply concerning. Mr. Wallace, I would just say, as this committee considers your nomination, I hope you will heed these concerns and clearly convey a willingness to moderate some of these trouble actions. I also hope that we can work together to find bipartisan opportunities that support both solid science and conservation.

I believe that tackling climate change is one such opportunity. And due to climate change, our treasured national parks and refuges in the west are increasingly beset by catastrophic fires. Worsening storms are damaging our coastal parks and refuges.

Recently, the National Parks Conservation Association found that out of 417 parks surveyed, 96 percent faced significant air quality problems. You will learn more about how you will work to address these challenges. I believe it is now more important than ever that we work together to make sure our parks and our refuges are more resilient to climate change so that Americans may have the opportunity to visit these places for generations to come.

Mr. Wallace, you also possess a great deal of expertise in habitat conservation and mitigation. You and I have discussed your work in both Wyoming and in Delaware on projects that mean a great deal to each of us and to this committee. Clearly, you understand the importance of mitigating negative impacts on our environment. I believe that understanding provides another great opportunity for you to lead within the Department of the Interior.

So we look forward to hearing how you will utilize this expertise as Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks if confirmed. Right now, we need qualified leaders who are

committed to safeguarding our natural resources. I feel confident that you are up to that challenge.

Thank you again for joining us. Again, welcome to your family. We look forward to hearing your testimony and to the conversation that will follow your testimony. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Senator Carper follows:]

Senator Barrasso. Thank you, Senator Carper.

Seeing that Senator Enzi is here, I think if there is any Senator that is mentioned in this committee, who is not a member of this committee, the number one person on that list would be Mike Enzi, as you talk about his 80-20 rule, a good way to get things done legislatively and in a bipartisan way and working for the way.

Senator Carper. Absolutely. I was in an Aspen Institute seminar in Prague last week, and we focused on U.S. relations with China, U.S. relations with Russia. We talked about Mike Enzi and the 80-20 rule. So you are all over the charts and all over the map.

Senator Barrasso. With that, let me welcome to the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works Senator Mike Enzi, Senior Senator for Wyoming, who will do the introduction. Senator Enzi, thanks so much for joining us today.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MIKE ENZI, A UNITED STATES SENATOR
FROM THE STATE OF WYOMING

Senator Enzi. Mr. Chairman. Chairman Barrasso and Ranking Member Carper, it is my privilege to introduce Rob Wallace, who is testifying in front of your committee today on his nomination to serve as Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks at the Department of Interior.

I have known Rob for many years, probably most of his life. I don't think there could be a better choice to fill the position. I am going to repeat some of the things that Chairman Barrasso said. I am a retailer, and I know that when you run an ad the first time, hardly anybody gets it. If you run it again, a few more do. And I would be willing to run this several times if it would help on the nomination.

Rob was born and raised in Wyoming, where he quickly learned the important role that the Department of Interior plays in the upkeep of our State's natural beauty. In fact, Rob's first job after college was with the National Park Service. He served as a seasonal ranger in Grand Teton National Park. For five years, Rob helped with the preservation and maintenance of one of our Nation's finest parks.

His passion for our Nation's public lands sent him here to Washington, where he handled energy and environment issues for former Wyoming Senator Malcolm Wallop, and before leaving

Capitol Hill, he served as staff director of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. He returned to Sheridan and the incredible Big Horn Mountains, until Rob once again came back to Washington, where he served as Assistant Director for the National Park Service for Congressional and Legislative Affairs.

During this time, he supervised the Reagan Administration's legislative agenda for national parks, which included readjusting visitor entrance fees, providing resources to fight the 1988 forest fires, and adding several new units to the national park system. In 1989, Rob became Senator Wallop's Chief of Staff, before heading back to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee in 1991, to again serve as staff director.

I first met Rob in 1995, when he served as Chief of Staff to the Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer, and I was in the State legislature. These days, Rob is still involved in Wyoming and the management of our public lands. Rob serves as the president of the Upper Green River Conservancy. Now, that is a sage grouse habitat bank that partners with ranchers, energy companies and conservation groups that work together to protect critical sage grouse habitat.

Rob's career and character reflect a man willing to step up and serve his community and Country. His years of experience at Interior and in the halls of Congress have well suited him to

this new chapter. I am pleased to introduce him to you today, and I hope you will give his nomination full and fair consideration.

[The prepared statement of Senator Enzi follows.]

Senator Barrasso. Thank you for joining us, Senator Enzi. We will have another opportunity tomorrow to introduce Rob, because this is one of those positions that requires hearings in two committees, the Environment and Public Works Committee and the Energy Committee. So I look forward to seeing you again tomorrow morning in that committee as we introduce our friend, Rob.

You are welcome to stay as long as you like. I know you have a pressing schedule, but thanks for being with us and joining us today, Senator Enzi. Thank you.

Now, I would like to welcome to our committee the nominee, Rob Wallace, the nominee to be Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks at the Department of the Interior. I want to remind you; your full written testimony will be made part of the record. I look forward to hearing your testimony. I see some of your family are here. I know many of your friends are here. So, please, begin at your convenience.

Mr. Wallace. With the opening statement, Senator?

Senator Barrasso. Please, and if you would like to introduce your family, as well.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT WALLACE, NOMINATED TO BE ASSISTANT SECRETARY
FOR FISH, WILDLIFE, AND PARKS, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Mr. Wallace. Absolutely. Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Carper and members of the committee, thank you for having me here today. I am grateful to the President for nominating me to this position, and thank Secretary Bernhardt for his support.

I would also like to recognize family members who are here from Wyoming today, my wife, Celia, who is not only a remarkable partner but epitomizes the spirit of bipartisanship, having worked for both a Democrat and Republican member of the Senate years ago.

My oldest daughter, Morgan, just finished her sophomore year in engineering at Wake Forest University, and is down from New York where she is doing a renewable energy internship this summer. And my youngest daughter, Ella, finished fourth grade and cannot be here today, because she is home studying for the SSAT in the event she has to apply for a new school next fall.

[Laughter.]

Mr. Wallace. The four of us live a mile south of Grand Teton National Park and the Yellowstone ecosystem. Each year, our community hosts millions of visitors who come to play in two of the world's majestic national parks. They also marvel at the abundant wildlife we all enjoy, thanks to wise management by State and federal officials, and the National Elk Refuge,

located in the heart of our valley.

But I know that simply living in a special place isn't sufficient justification to ask for your support to oversee two of the world's most celebrated agencies, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. So I would like to explain a little bit about how I got here.

My journey began decades ago when I was hired right out of college as a seasonal park ranger in Grand Teton National Park. For the next five years, I patrolled the park's rivers and lakes, worked with the mountain rescue team, enforced the game and fish regulations, performed law enforcement operations and emergency medical services on the park's highways, and traveled on skis for days at a time across the Yellowstone and Grand Teton back country. And in the fall, if my park work ended early, I worked at an elk hunting camp at a nearby national forest.

But it wasn't the daily adventures that had the most profound effect on me. It was the political issues that swirled around every aspect of my job. Here was a place where dignitaries from around the world had traveled to attend the Second World Conference on National Parks, and where the President of the United States came to relax. Up the road, in Yellowstone, a raging debate was brewing over how to wean grizzly bears off human garbage. And in the Tetons, vibrant

conversation was underway about fire management, search and rescue, visitors' use, and resource protection.

In an effort to find a way to get more involved in these issues and others, I quit my park job and volunteered on a campaign for Malcolm Wallop, who was running for the United States Senate from Wyoming. His race succeeded, and suddenly I had a front-row seat to some of the most consequential energy, wildlife and natural resource issues in a generation.

Starting my Senate career as an LA, following the EPW committee, and ending up as the minatory staff director of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I was here when Congress tackled the Alaska Lands legislation, a crippling oil embargo, the Three Mile Island nuclear accident, the Exxon Valdez oil spill, the restructuring of the U.S. electricity industry, controversial endangered species issues, such as the spotted owl and the snail darter, and much more.

I also broadened my understanding of new park authorizations, fee legislation, concession oversight and the importance of timely communications with Congress, while heading the Park Service's office of Congressional Relations. Later, as chief of staff to the Governor of Wyoming, I was in the middle of wolf reintroduction in Yellowstone.

I ended my time in Washington working for GE, where my primary responsibility was leading a policy team that focused on

the deployment of clean energy technologies in the United States and around the world. Over the years, I also became a champion of public-private partnerships, through serving on boards of several natural resources organizations, whose missions were to help fund infrastructure projects, augment wildlife research budgets, and provide opportunities for young people to work and learn on our public lands. Today, I work on the frontiers of the Endangered Species Act in southwestern Wyoming, bringing ranchers, regulators, conservationists, and industry leaders together to protect large-scale habitats of the greater sage grouse, while removing barriers to multiple use.

Along the way, I have learned so much, especially that no one ever wins by winning everything, that bipartisan solutions are always the lasting solutions, and that the key success to management is recruiting good people and trusting them to do their jobs.

Finally, if confirmed, I want to stress my commitment to work constructively with Congress on behalf of our parks, refuges, fish, and wildlife. If well-meaning people engage in good faith and communicate effectively, the benefit to these national treasures can be unlimited.

I thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Wallace follows:]

Senator Barrasso. Thanks so much for your testimony.
Welcome to your family here today.

Throughout this hearing, and with questions for the record, the committee members are going to have the opportunity to learn more about your commitment to public service for our great Nation.

I have to ask a couple of questions for the record, which we do of all nominees. The first is, do you agree, if confirmed, to appear before this committee or designated members of the committee and other appropriate committees of Congress and provide information, subject to appropriate and necessary security protection, with respect to your responsibilities?

Mr. Wallace. I do.

Senator Barrasso. And do you agree to ensure that testimony, briefings, documents and electronic and other forms of information are provided to this committee and its staff and other appropriate committees in a timely manner?

Mr. Wallace. Yes.

Senator Barrasso. And do you know of any matters, which you may or may not have disclosed, that might place you in any conflict of interest if you are confirmed?

Mr. Wallace. I do not.

Senator Barrasso. I will now begin with questions. Then we will alternate back and forth, Senator Carper will go after I

do.

Can you just explain a little bit about how your experiences that you have had prepared you to oversee the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service? You talked a bit about it in your opening statement. Anything else that comes to mind in terms of specific experience? I know you have been a rescue ranger, worked the back country, have seen it from all different levels.

Mr. Wallace. I think one of the great things about being here at this time in my career is having seen a lot of different aspects of both the Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Endangered Species Act, to the point where you see the power of good people coming together to solve complicated problems. I have seen that throughout my career. I know you all work with it every day in the committee.

But it is the belief, as I said in my statement, people working in good faith on complicated issues can achieve remarkable, good things.

Senator Barrasso. And along that line, I think about the American Water Infrastructure Act that we got through the Senate 99 to 1, it authorizes increased funding for things like watercraft inspection stations, in order to stop the spread of aquatic invasive species. The committee also led the enactment of the WILD Act, Wildlife Innovation and Longevity Driver Act,

requires the specific agencies to develop strategic plans to reduce invasive species, on lands that they manage, and provides, actually, cash prizes for innovative solutions to better combat the invasive species.

What is your assessment, if I could, of the invasive species threat to our Nation's wildlife in the national park system, and can we better use and coordinate efforts along those lines?

Mr. Wallace. That is a question I have thought a lot about since the President nominated me for this position. We have, Senator Barrasso, as you know, invasive species in Wyoming, whether it is cheat grass or lake trout in Yellowstone or even trying to prevent quagga mussels from getting into the Snake River drainage and getting all the way down into the Columbia River. Every time I heard the word invasive species, I think it is just going to turn out like a bad vampire movie, because it is something that whatever you do, you are not going to be able to curtail.

I think, if confirmed for this position, it is a chance to really think through what the departments are already doing, and see if we have to take our game up to a different level. Because they are everywhere.

Senator Barrasso. I am thinking about the time you were chief of staff for Governor Geringer. He served at the same

time Senator Carper was a governor, so we have the State side of this, then we have the federal side of it. Do you have any thoughts on how we can foster better coordination between federal and State wildlife agencies? Because States are putting a lot of money into wildlife efforts as well.

Mr. Wallace. I have. The word partner is a very easy word to say, we all say partner, but it is a lot harder to do. It takes a lot of work. What do you mean by partnerships? It is respecting the government-to-government partnerships between tribes and between States and sometimes local communities, it is respecting the partnerships between NGOs and conservation groups that care deeply.

And a partnership is a partnership. That is what you commit to, you work with a State, you get the best advice from the professionals that work on an issue, and you work constructively toward a solution.

Senator Barrasso. And I want to pick up on the word partnership, because, as you used it, under the leadership of this committee, the reauthorization of what is the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program was enacted into law in March. It is a voluntary program encouraging U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and private landowners, because I had asked you about State and federal, but I am talking about now U.S. Fish and Wildlife and private landowners to work together on habitat conservation and

restoration projects. Can you talk about proactive, voluntary conservation efforts, by landowners, private entities, when it comes to protecting wildlife and their habitat?

Mr. Wallace. I look forward to working with you and the committee and others and implementing that Act, if confirmed.

Senator Barrasso. So there is an important role, working with the private landowners as well, and other private entities, in terms of working along those lines.

As Assistant Secretary, you are going to oversee both the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service. Although these agencies have fundamentally different missions, the authorities often overlap, certainly on lands across the west. You have seen it first-hand in Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks. The lands provide habitat for important species and are also drivers of the local economies. You see it all around Wyoming.

If confirmed, how would you balance the diverse and sometimes competing missions of these two different agencies that you will oversee?

Mr. Wallace. I think, Senator, the issue there is the interagency working groups that have come together on grizzly bears and others that we have seen throughout Wyoming and I am sure in other parts of the west. It is making sure those interagency groups are working together, coordinating with one

another and not creating confusing data for the public to digest and try and understand.

Senator Barrasso. Thank you. Senator Carper.

Senator Carper. I was happy to hear the name Jim Geringer. We served together six years, I was elected in 1992, he was elected in 1994. Wonderful man, and it was a joy to serve with him.

I don't mean to ask a bunch of yes or no questions. I would ask three of them, and then I'll ask questions that will take more than yes or no to respond to.

The first question is, do you agree with our Nation's leading scientists, including those within the Department of Interior, who have concluded that climate change is real, is caused in large part by humans, and is impacting fish, wildlife and parks? Do you agree with that?

Mr. Wallace. Senator, I do agree that climate change is an issue and that humans have a very important role in that situation.

Senator Carper. That is good. Thank you. Second question. Do you question the conclusions of the Fourth National Climate Assessment that stated our Nation's ecosystems and economy are at grave risk in the decades to come if we do not take climate actions today?

Mr. Wallace. Senator, to be perfectly honest, I haven't

read the assessment. I am aware of it, along with the IPCC 1.5. Yes, I am aware of the issues. I know that scientists are clearly moving in that direction. But to be fair, I have not read the report.

Senator Carper. I will just ask you to answer again, for the record.

Mr. Wallace. Okay.

Senator Carper. Thank you.

Last yes or no question. Do you commit to this committee that if confirmed, you will not directly or indirectly interfere or undermine climate science?

Mr. Wallace. Senator, I believe in the importance of climate science and the independence of science.

Senator Carper. I will take that, thank you. Follow-up question, if I could. As Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, what will you do to make our parks and refuges more resilient in the face of climate change?

Mr. Wallace. Let me take a drink of water on that one.

Senator Carper. I will say it again while you take a drink of water. As Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, what will you do to make our parks and refuges more resilient in the face of climate change?

Mr. Wallace. Let me, if I could, sort of describe my job, if confirmed, how I see it, Senator. If you looked at the

combined assets of both the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service, there is approximately 1,000 units in 50 States and 5 territories. If you look at, I guess one way I would look at your climate question is, to understand where the stress is on all of these different agencies, or all of these different areas, and have a system in place where you are systematically evaluating how they stand.

So in the example of climate change, we know that the Governor of Louisiana is trying to adapt for that anticipation by thinking of moving communities up off of southeastern Louisiana. You see the Fish and Wildlife Service doing coastal resiliency projects in North Carolina with oyster bed construction.

In Alaska, with melting sea ice, it is a completely different sort of equation, and how do you evaluate it. And also perhaps the coast of Oregon or Washington State, where they are worried about ocean acidification.

But there are also other issues, I think, that adds stress to it that I could not ignore if in this position. We talked about invasive species, what is habitat fragmentation doing to migratory corridors in other parts. If you care deeply about historic areas in the National Park Service, what about battlefields, like Champion Hills and Vicksburg that may be rounded out if the parks focus on that? So I certainly

acknowledge the climate issue, and I also acknowledge that there are other stressors within the system that I would also be responsible for.

But let me tell you how I would look at all three of those. First of all, and foremost, follow the law. What does the law say you have to do, can't do or should do? Number one. Number two is, follow the science. What are your professionals telling you about how to solve these problems? And it is not just the 50,000-foot science, it is the sort of on the ground science, by science managers, applied science, if you will. What are they telling you to do about the problem?

Then the third, and I talked about this with Senator Barrasso, I think it is very important, it is the role of partnerships. You can't solve scale problems unless you can figure out how to be a good partner. Sometimes the Federal Government is the alpha and the partnership debate, and I don't think that is the right construct, especially given so many interests from so many groups around the Country to get involved.

Senator Carper. We will take that question; I might come back with a question for the record and you can have a chance to think about it and respond further. If we have another round of questions, I will ask a few more questions. Thank you.

Senator Barrasso. Senator Cramer.

Senator Cramer. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, thank you, Mr. Wallace, for being here.

When Secretary Bernhardt was going through this same process, he and I dug in a little a little bit on a few issues that, I don't want to call them North Dakota specific, but they are rather North Dakota-centric. One in particular that centers around the prairie pothole region, and what I think is somewhat of a unique situation for North Dakota, in that our farmers, over the last century or so, in our rectangle up there in the northern part of our Country, had been such great stewards of water that they didn't drain a lot of land when it was vogue to do that throughout the prairie. Consequently, sometimes I think their good actions earlier have been probably biting them a little bit.

So when it comes to specifically WPAs, or the watershed protection area easements that some of our famers have inherited from their great-grandfather or grandfathers, with the lack of a clear delineation, historically poor mapping, what I consider an inadequate appeals process, lack of consistency with NRCS, particularly Swampbuster, enforcement inconsistencies, I raised all these issues with the Secretary in hopes that we could work on together, between stakeholders, partners, politically diverging ideals, in a way to provide better clarity for our famers and avoid what I consider sometimes to be enforcement or

regulatory takings.

With your background, it seems to me you like have a great background. I was thinking specifically in fact about your sage grouse habitat mitigation work. I would just sort of challenge you at this level now and then we can certainly get into more specifics at a later time, as you get into the job. Just looking for ideas on how we can help these farmers, both within the legal construct, but then with advice, and like I said, if there is a mitigation plan that can accomplish everybody's goals while at the same time allowing our farmers to continue to grow food for a growing world population.

I just want to plant that seed with you and look forward to a very specific discussion.

Also, by the way, the Secretary committed to coming out to visit with our farmers. If you are confirmed prior to whenever that trip takes place, it would be great if you could join him on that trip. But first of all, just sort of in general, any thoughts about WPA easements and some work that we can maybe get done that again, accomplishes everybody's goals without further taking from our landowners?

Mr. Wallace. One of the great things about this job, if I am confirmed, is to think about issues that I don't know a lot about. Right now, I can tell you this, Senator, if this is important to you, I will be committed to learning a lot more

about it, perhaps coming to visit with you and meet some of your constituents and hear first-hand the challenges you have. And to the degree that it is within my ability in the department to help, given the legal and scientific issues that will also be there, more than happy to do that.

Senator Cramer. I appreciate that. And I think one of the things you bring to the job, and you and I had not met before, but when you have such a strong endorsement as the two Senators from Wyoming have given, it is hard to argue with you, to be honest, not just because he is the Chairman, because I am a member of two Wyoming Senators' chairmanship, but because they are such quality people.

You seem to be able to bridge the political intricacies pretty effectively. That is not a minor issue. As you point out, Delaware and Wyoming, we oftentimes find big differences. But you seem to have that ability, and I would look forward to tapping into that capacity that you have to accomplish these things.

So I am just going to leave it at that for now, but I look forward to further discussion.

Mr. Wallace. I look forward to learning more about it, Senator. Thank you.

Senator Cramer. Thank you. I look forward to further discussion.

Senator Carper. I would add that there is a Wyoming, Delaware. And it just south of Dover.

[Laughter.]

Senator Carper. I have great affection for Wyoming, Delaware.

Senator Barrasso. Senator Braun.

Senator Braun. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is always an enjoyable conversation for me, because I practice conservation and at home during our recess, will never give up that part of it, get a few fishing trips in and so forth.

I think it is sometimes overwhelming, invasive species. I have been fighting them on my own properties for years. I wonder how far that has gotten out of hand to where we can mostly try to contain rather than eliminate. But I don't want to focus on that now, I want to focus on what I have observed over time and have you weigh in on it.

Twice during the break, I saw bald eagles on private lakes where, my goodness, where until maybe 10, 12 years ago in Indiana, when I was on the White River, had not seen a bald eagle. And now, they were doing so well, they are starting to colonize a lot of small lakes and places where you never imagined.

Beavers, I remember as a kid I saw one on Potoka Lake when

I was about 15 years old. It was like a rare sighting. Deer were basically extinct in Indiana until conservation efforts turned around.

I noticed a lot of good stuff, including otters, to where now there is an open season on otters, simply because they have been reintroduced and are doing so well. Bobcats would be on the cusp.

So when we talk about fish and wildlife, weigh in on what is good that is happening. Because it is depressing, to be honest, when we focus on invasive species. I know we need to, just, how do we grapple with it? Talk a little bit about what you have observed over the last few decades and are really wins and pluses, put it in perspective with all the challenges we have.

Mr. Wallace. Well, Senator, I have observed the same thing that you have over time. When I was a ranger in the Grand Teton, the bald eagles were still at risk. Now, they are abundant. We have also seen in Wyoming peregrine falcons come back, black footed ferrets, through some very collaborative breeding. Sage grouse, which a lot of us have been working to keep off the endangered species list. Whooping cranes, grizzly bears have come back. They have come back in force in Wyoming.

So you sure look at the wise management of these wildlife laws and say, it has been a success. At the same time, you want

to know, what can we do better going forward, are there wiser ways to manage, to think about species recovery. I am fully aware that that will be a responsibility of mine if confirmed for this job.

Senator Braun. So in general, then, I think it would be fair to say that some of the particulars of especially conservation and wildlife preservation, we have a lot of good things to talk about. Would you view either invasive species and/or climate change as being things that in the near term could set back any of that, where we have had such rapid progression in the right direction? Do you view either one of those, because I agree both are intractable issues. We have to find out a way to deal with them.

Do you see any of the gains we have made in somewhat immediate threat, or do you think that is in the longer context as well?

Mr. Wallace. That is a great question, and I think about it, too, because climate is on the minds of lots of people, the public, members. If you look at what is happening in the Florida Everglades with the Burmese python, there are songbirds at risk of blinking out down there because of that invasive species. In Wyoming, about 25 years ago, a bucket biologist dumped a bunch of lake trout into Yellowstone Lake, as predators of one of the world's richest natural cutthroat populations

anywhere in the world. Pound for pound, lake trout wins every time over a cutthroat. That was an important food group for the grizzly bears during the spawning. It really started to upset the entire balance of Yellowstone.

It took biologists a number of years to figure out they had an invasive species problem, and then what to do about it. It was more than just letting everybody go out and catch as many lake trout as they wanted. Because the lake trout were winning that fight every day. They finally brought commercial seiners in from the Great Lakes that are catching hundreds of thousands of lake trout a year. I talked to the superintendent a few days ago, he said they put as much in gill netting down in Yellowstone Lake every year to stretch from Yellowstone to Naples, Florida, just to get a handle on an invasive species.

So it goes to your point, Senator, that I think the federal agencies and State agencies need to be observant to identifying a potential risk, is it coming, what can you do to prevent it. If it is here, how do you stabilize it, and then what do you do to reverse it. Those threats, I believe there is an Asian Carp Coalition here from members in the Mississippi and the Great Lakes. It is a big issue. I would be glad to have support to think seriously about that.

Senator Braun. Thank you.

Mr. Wallace. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Barrasso. Senator Markey, welcome.

Senator Markey. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, very much.

The Monomoy Refuge, Mr. Wallace, in 2015, the Fish and Wildlife Service finalized a revised comprehensive conservation plan for the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge that reinterpreted the refuge boundaries to include the waters and submerged lands to the west of the refuge. This potentially makes it harder for Chatham residents to moor fishing boats, hunt or collect shellfish in those waters as they have been doing so for years.

The Trump Administration has advocated for more recreational access to public lands, refuges and parks. But in the Monomoy Refuge, the Town of Chatham and its residents are concerned that they are losing their longstanding access.

Mr. Wallace, if confirmed, will you commit to working with me to ensure public access, while also protecting the environment in this special place?

Mr. Wallace. Senator, I will. I know this is a very important issue to you. You have raised it at Interior. I have had a chance to learn a little bit about it by speaking with your staff recently. If it would be helpful, I would be happy to come up there with you to meet with the people in Chatham and understand it first-hand. Thank you.

Senator Markey. Yes, the town of Chatham has been a great steward of these waters, dating back more than 60 years. I am a

strong supporter of our national refuges and believe that our beautiful lands and waters deserve protection. It is my hope that we can find a resolution to this issue that continues to protect and safeguard this unique piece of our Country. So I would appreciate it if you would come.

Mr. Wallace, if you are confirmed, you would be in charge of our parks and refuges, a collection of national treasures that belong to all Americans. As Senator Carper has already noted in his questions, climate change is threatening these beautiful wild places. Rainfall is down, wildfires are up, bark beetles and pathogens are spreading and species are disappearing.

Mr. Wallace, to follow up on Senator Carper's conversation with you, will you commit to addressing the climate crisis as part of your management of our national parks, wildlife, refuges, if confirmed?

Mr. Wallace. Senator, yes. The key, as I mentioned earlier, there are three stools to this. You have to adapt and to moderate the consequences of not only climate, but invasive species. But to do that within the law, with what the scientists are telling us and to work in strong partnership to do that work.

Senator Markey. Yes, I just don't think it is possible to responsible stewards and conservationists if we are not dealing

with the consequences of the climate crisis. It just goes hand in glove for the rest of our lives. We have to responsibly deal with that.

The State of Alaska is proposing the development of a 200-mile industrial road that would cut through the gates of the Arctic National Preserve and bisect one of the longest land migration routes in the world. Western Arctic caribou herd travels as far as 2,700 miles a year from their wintering grounds along the Bering Sea to their calving grounds on the Arctic coastal plain. This migration is longer than the distance between New York and Seattle, and it could be cut off if this road moves forward.

Mr. Wallace, are you aware of this proposal and the planning process currently underway?

Mr. Wallace. Senator, I am actually not that familiar. Of course, from the news, but I haven't been down to the Department of Interior yet, having just been the nominee for 22 days. But I know this is an issue that will be in my office and I will be quickly getting up to speed on it.

Senator Markey. Obviously, this road is going to have a huge impact on wildlife and public lands in the region. So we are going to be working with you on this overseeing what is going to be taking place here. Because it could have severe adverse impacts in that region. We are just going to be

expecting you to work with us to make sure that that damage does not occur.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman, very much.

Senator Barrasso. Thank you very much, Senator Markey.

We are fortunate to have joining us now the Senator from Alaska, who may have some input on that very issue.

Senator Sullivan. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really love my colleague, Ed Markey. He and I work together on a bunch of things. But his attention to Alaska sometimes astounds me.

[Laughter.]

Senator Sullivan. Because with all due respect to the Senator from Alaska, I care a hell of a lot more about Alaska and my constituents than he does. So I am just trying to get the numbers of miles of roads that Alaska has relative to Massachusetts. My State is probably, well, I know it is 491 times the size of Rhode Island.

Senator Whitehouse. Yes, you had to say that.

[Laughter.]

Senator Sullivan. But it is probably at least 200 times the size of Massachusetts. And I guarantee you, Massachusetts has more roads than my State. So most Alaskans really want roads.

And here is the thing. Unfortunately, radical environmental groups always do this, oh, my God, everything is

going to die when you build a road, a damned road. In most States, you can build a road anywhere you want, and you don't have 80 environmental groups suing to stop it. But in my State, you try to build a road, one damned road, and you will have so many outside groups who don't care about my constituents, suing to stop a road.

Most people just assume you can build a road anywhere in America. Can't build a road in Alaska, though, because of colleagues like my friend, good friend Ed Markey, who want to stop roads.

Senator Barrasso. What is the number on the roads?

Senator Sullivan. We have a third the number of miles of roads than Massachusetts, and we are probably at least 200 times the size of the State. So just take that one there, Mr. Wallace. We are going to be working on making sure -- and by the way, when you hear the parade of horrors, remember last time there was a parade of horrible on the porcupine caribou herd is when we built the Trans-Alaska pipeline, one of the most important features of American energy independence in certainly our Country.

The parade of horrors was the porcupine caribou herd was going to be destroyed. It increased four times the size when the pipeline was built. Now, you never hear the radical environmental groups saying that, because it wasn't true. The

same stuff is going on with the development of Anwar, which you are going to have a role in, which this Congress passed, the President signed, the Alaskan people want it, almost 70 percent want it.

So we are going to work with you on that as well. But don't believe the hype. We need roads in Alaska. They are not going to harm the caribou. And the outside groups that want to shut down Alaska, who none of them live there, by the way, you are going to listen to my constituents more than those groups, because my constituents want roads, we need roads.

This just kind of aggravates me, as you can see. I have so many Senators caring about roads in my State, when they have a lot more roads than my State does. And it is not fair, it is not fair. You can't build a road in Alaska, because outside groups stop to sue it, sue to stop it. It is outrageous. I wish they would come and sue when you guys in Rhode Island or Massachusetts wanted to build a road. Nobody sues to stop building roads in your States. But they all come to my State.

So we are going to work on that, and we are going to build that road. And it is not going to hurt the caribou at all.

So let me get to my questions. Mr. Wallace, the Supreme Court recently ruled nine to zero, Elena Kagan in a landmark decision for Alaska in a case just recently, called *Sturgeon v. Frost*, which was about ANILCA. I am sure you are familiar with

ANILCA, another huge federal law that tried to lock up Alaska passed in 1980. To just kind of -- well, first, have you read the Sturgeon v. Frost case?

Mr. Wallace. Senator, I have not.

Senator Sullivan. So before we vote on your confirmation, I think it is critical that you read that decision. Can I get your commitment that you will?

Mr. Wallace. If it is important to you, Senator, I will do that, yes.

Senator Sullivan. It is a really important case. It essentially says that for decades, ANILCA has not been implemented correctly by federal agencies, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service. So I would like to get a commitment with you, this is a nine to zero Supreme Court case, to work with me as you look to revise your regulations that would implement the holding of the U.S. Supreme Court nine to zero in Sturgeon v. Frost. Can I get your commitment to work with me and my office on that?

Mr. Wallace. Senator, if it is an important issue to you, it will be an important issue to me.

Senator Barrasso. Can I interrupt for one second, Senator? So, ANILCA, for those of us, it is the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act passed in 1980.

Senator Sullivan. Correct.

Senator Barrasso. For some other members of the committee and the audience. Thank you.

Senator Sullivan. Thank you. And let me ask, I know I am running out of time, I didn't think I was going to talk about roads, but my colleague got me spun up on that.

We have a problem in southeast Alaska with sea otters, which have grown in enormous numbers in terms of population. They are not listed as endangered. And they are having a very negative impact on a very important industry in southeast Alaska, shellfish, fin fish, fisheries. I was just in southeast Alaska the last couple of weeks and this issue is reaching kind of an emergency level proportions.

Can I get your commitment, Mr. Wallace, if confirmed, to work with me and my office on addressing this big issue with regard to the sea otter population and its negative impact on fisheries in Alaska, which is really, like I said, reaching crisis proportions?

Mr. Wallace. Senator, this is marine mammal issue on taking with the sea otter.

Senator Sullivan. It is, and it is also the decimation that they have had with regard to the fishing industry. But the Fish and Wildlife Service has oversight and responsibility as it relates to this issue.

Mr. Wallace. I commit to learning a lot more about this

issue than I know now, and be back to visit with you about it.

Senator Sullivan. Great. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Barrasso. Thank you, Senator Sullivan. Senator Whitehouse.

Senator Whitehouse. Thank you, Chairman.

Welcome, Mr. Wallace. The Chairman speaks very highly of you and says that I am probably going to like you. He is a very honorable man and I appreciate that very much.

You do suffer the catastrophic disability of being from a landlocked State, however.

[Laughter.]

Senator Whitehouse. But I think your sense of nature and her beauty is probably animated every time you wake up and see the glow of the dawn on the Tetons. You certainly do come from a special place in the world.

I wanted to ask you a little bit about a local issue, and then an oceans issue. The local issue is that we have a Blackstone Valley park that has been worked on for some time. It is still being fully defined. And unlike other national parks where you start with basically a big empty piece of land, you draw the metes and bounds and you say, that is a park now, this park exists in a very developed environment. It is a series of specific locations threaded through by the historic

Blackstone River. It runs up into Massachusetts as well.

It has been described as like a pearl necklace with all these different pearls along the way, and the thread that ties them together is the river. But it has been through being a protected area, it has been through being a national protected river, it has been through a whole variety of iterations on its way to becoming a national park.

So it is not an easy thing to run through. There are a lot of bureaucratic hooks and attachment, there is a lot of stuff going on. And you have to think about park land in a slightly new way to adapt it to the existing developed environment this park will inhabit.

So I am going to need to be able to talk to you about that, and to get your attention. Because this is not the type of park you are used to out west, where you come to the gate and there is the park ranger, and in you go and now you are on park land. This is a very different idea of how you can make a park work. And not only are we trying to thread the river through all of this, we are trying to make sure that the river is traversable through all of this area, so that there are put-ins and take-outs for canoes, and for people who don't want to do that, that there are bike paths that connect all of this.

And all of this is through built areas, and in-built areas. So it has been a long, long, long, long, long, slow, process I

just want to make sure that you will take a good look at this when you get in. I want the chance to come and talk you through what this has been and where we are trying to get, so that you understand that the command level, the complexities of closing out this particular park and launching it as a crown jewel of New England.

Mr. Wallace. Senator, I look forward to working with you, if confirmed, on this issue. We will certainly know more about it the next time we see each other than I do right now.

Senator Whitehouse. Yes. Well, thank you, and we will get together on that.

Mr. Wallace. Okay.

Senator Whitehouse. The other issue I want to talk with you about is oceans. Again, from Wyoming, we are always a little bit suspicious of landlocked States and how much interest they will have in oceans. The Department of Interior has a long, long history of focusing on the west and on inland and upland issues, without paying much attention to coastal issues. We are now seeing dramatic coastal changes, driven by sea level rise, temperature change, acidification, the concerns that you have mentioned already.

But it makes the coasts a matter of real concern. And I wanted to let you know that not only is it a matter of really grave concern, but it is also a matter of real bipartisan

opportunity. Ocean plastics is a critical issue. The Interior Department website talks about the eight million tons of plastic waste that gets dumped in the oceans every year. The President signed Senator Sullivan's and my legislation in a very, how shall we say, lively Oval Office ceremony. It passed unanimously in the Senate. It passed on suspension in the House. We are working on another one that we are hoping will pass unanimously. Senator Inhofe from Oklahoma has been one of our key supporters on all of this.

So what I want you to take away from this is a, we are going to be coming after you on oceans. You need to pay attention to this. It is not just upland and inland any longer. And b, there are big, big bipartisan opportunities for you to help lead and to support in this area. We are often a divided committee. On these oceans issues, acidification, plastics, sea level rise, coastal wetlands, there is enormous potential. Seize the day.

Mr. Wallace. Again, this is an area, as you noted, I am from a landlocked State. But I am certainly aware of the issues that members like you in the coastal States are grappling with. I look forward to learning a lot more about what we are doing at the Department of Interior, the opportunity for partnerships, coastal resiliency issues. Thank you, I will be smarter on that one, too, the next time I see you.

Senator Whitehouse. And some day, Mr. Chairman, we might even change the name so it is not just the Department of the Interior.

[Laughter.]

Senator Whitehouse. There are some edges that count too.

Senator Barrasso. Thank you, Senator Whitehouse. And heading to one of those edges, welcome back, Senator Sullivan.

Senator Sullivan. Mr. Chairman, thanks again. Mr. Wallace, I just want to reiterate what my friend, Senator Whitehouse, mentioned. There is a great opportunity, we will be introducing our Save Our Seas 2.0 legislation here soon, where we think there is a great bipartisan opportunity. The President and the Administration are really engaged on these issues. And it is actually an environmental issue that is solvable. Estimates are anywhere up from ten rivers, five countries in Asia constitute over 80 percent of the plastic ocean waste in the world.

So there is a lot we can do. Senator Whitehouse has really been the leader on this in the Senate. He and I have been working together the last several years on it. We want to bring you in on that. It is a great area of bipartisan cooperation with everybody on board, industry, environmental groups, the Trump Administration, Democrats, Republicans. I think we should, as he mentioned, seize the day. So we will have a good

opportunity to talk about this in our follow-up meeting tomorrow, I think.

Senator Whitehouse. And I would just commend the Chairman and the Ranking Member for their bipartisan engagement on this issue as well. It has really been terrific.

Senator Barrasso. Thank you, Senator Whitehouse.

Senator Braun?

Senator Braun. Thank you. I have a bill that proposes that we take a defined inventory on the maintenance that is required on federal properties. Indiana Dunes is now a national park. It was up there a few weeks ago. One of the original homesteads in that area, which was used by the State, it has fallen into disrepair, several million dollars' worth of cost.

What is your opinion on the need to size up to see what the cost is? It is maybe estimated \$15 billion to \$20 billion, no one really knows. Do you think with an asset base that large, that we ought to have an inventory of what the maintenance needs would be?

Mr. Wallace. Senator, again, having not been down to the department yet, it is one of those issues that I would like to take back to the professionals down there to see how they are thinking about this issue. You are certainly, your question makes a lot of sense. You ought to know what you are trying to fix before you go fix something. Just on the surface of what

you just told me, it makes eminently good sense.

Senator Braun. I would like you to keep that in the consideration. Once the process is concluded and you are there, I would like you to keep that in mind. Because I think it is important, that is a huge figure. We need to know what it is and then start tackling the problem. Thank you.

Mr. Wallace. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Barrasso. Senator Carper.

Senator Carper. Mr. Wallace, as I mentioned in my opening statement, Delaware is real proud of, not of the fact that we were the last State to have a national park designated, but we were the first State, Delaware was the first State to ratify the Constitution. For seven whole days, Delaware was the entire United States of America.

And we opened things up, we let in Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and I think it has turned out all right most of the time. But our national park actually focuses on Delaware's historical, the arrival of the first Swedes and Finns to America, in Delaware, the Dutch presence in Lewes, Delaware. The last, I believe, the oldest standing house in America is in Lewes, Delaware. William Penn came to America in New Castle, Delaware, brought with him the deeds to what ultimately became Pennsylvania and Delaware. And the Constitution was first ratified in Dover, Delaware on December 7th, 1787.

The National park in Delaware actually tells part of the history of our Country through the eyes of Delaware and through those sites and places in Delaware that I have just mentioned.

The National Park Service has identified a location for a visitor center at the park, but has not yet committed to move to design and construction. The park is also in need of additional signage and a deer management plan. I would just ask you, if you might be willing to come and visit, if confirmed, to visit our State and take a look at our park and some of what we are really proud of, and also some of our needs.

Mr. Wallace. Senator, I would be honored to do that. Thank you for the invitation.

Senator Carper. You are welcome. Thank you for the answer.

Mr. Wallace. It is a yes, it is a yes.

Senator Carper. Next question. The Trump Administration has reassigned, I am told, several dozens of senior executive service employees. Some of these employees were outspoken, apparently, on climate change. A number of the reassignments have been perceived as retaliatory. Rather than accept reassignment, several of these dedicated public servants ultimately left the department.

As Assistant Secretary, would you be willing to provide to Congress detailed information about the rationale behind any

future SES reassignments upon request? I am not asking about past, looking back. Not retrospective, but in perspective.

Mr. Wallace. My sense, Senator, is that there would be a lot of privacy information. But again, I am not down there, I am not aware of, I am certainly aware because of the news about the SES issues. I would tell you personally I value greatly the SES people that I have run across during my time in government. I just don't know enough about this issue to make a commitment one way or the other about it. I am sorry, but I don't.

Senator Carper. All right. Then I am going to ask, would you commit to protect career staff at the Department of Interior, moving forward, and to bolster their expertise instead of suppressing it?

Mr. Wallace. I am sorry, could you give me that question again, please?

Senator Carper. Would you commit to protect career staff at the Department of the Interior, and bolster their expertise instead of suppressing it?

Mr. Wallace. I absolutely would. I am a big believer in the SES program. We have seen the caliber of the leaders that have come through, both in the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Park Service, they are just the tops. So I am a strong proponent of that. I also want a pipeline in place, so if somebody moves on, retires, takes another job, there is a bench

to come in and fill behind them of equally capable people.

So yes, sir.

Senator Carper. Thank you. And one last question. People travel from around the world to view birds and other wildlife at our two national wildlife refuges that sit right on the Delaware Bay. Bombay Hook is one of them, and the other is called Prime Hook. These special refuges employ less than a dozen people, and they have hundreds of acres, cover hundreds and hundreds of acres. But they employ less than a dozen people. The staff works hard to maintain the refuges and makes sure they remain accessible to the public.

Among other important positions, our refuges have a visitor services coordinator and a law enforcement official. As the Trump Administration continues Department of Interior reorganization efforts, would you commit to us today that refuge employees, like Delaware's, will not lose critical staff as a result? And how will you work with refuge managers and project leaders to make sure their staffing needs are met?

Mr. Wallace. I would be able to answer this, Senator Carper, in a general way, but also with a commitment, if we make that visit to the national park together, maybe also talk more and see more about the issue that you just raised with me personally. But we need motivated men and women in the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service that get up every

day and whistle while they go to work.

Senator Carper. Like we do here in the Senate.

[Laughter.]

Mr. Wallace. Exactly. I will do it in my job, if confirmed.

[Laughter].

Mr. Wallace. So the health and well-being and the training and the morale, there would be 3,000 people under the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, who are all going to be an important priority to me in terms of their training and their morale. I will be happy to learn more about the people in the refuge system that you just spoke of.

Senator Carper. We appreciate your answers. We probably have a couple of questions for the record, and if confirmed, we look forward to welcoming you, and perhaps your family, to the First State. Thanks very much.

Senator Barrasso. I want to thank you, Senator Carper.

I do have a letter of support for the nomination of Rob Wallace from the National Wildlife Refuge Association. It is from Geoffrey Haskett, he is the president of the association, who writes, "We believe Mr. Wallace has the background, experience, and leadership abilities to perform in an exceptional manner in the position of Assistant Secretary." I ask unanimous consent to enter this letter into the record.

Senator Carper. I object.

[Laughter.]

Senator Barrasso. Then I have 40 more. And they are wonderful letters --

Senator Carper. I don't object.

[Laughter.]

Senator Barrasso. -- of over sportsmen, environmental, and conservation groups have written in support of the nomination of Rob Wallace. These groups universally praised Rob's work experience, his knowledge of our Nation's public lands and wildlife. And I ask unanimous consent to enter these into the record.

[The referenced material follows:]

Senator Barrasso. And speaking of whistling your way to work, I noticed joining us in the back of the room is Kathi Wise, 40 years worked with Malcolm Wallop, worked with you as a member of the staff of Senator Wallop's team. Remains a stellar employee, whistles while she comes to work every day, really a treasure of the Senate. I just want to know if she has always had that kind of dedication and hard work and such character and credibility, or is that something you instilled in her as she was working with you as Malcolm's chief of staff? Or has that always been a part of her life?

Mr. Wallace. It is a legacy issue, Senator.

[Laughter.]

Senator Barrasso. Thank you for being here, thank you for bringing your family and so many friends. The opportunity for other members to put questions in for the record, we ask that they submit questions for the record by Thursday, June 6th, close of business. The nominee should respond to the questions by June 12th.

I want to thank you and congratulate you, thank you for your time and thank you for your testimony today.
Congratulations.

[Whereupon, at 11:23 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]