



Opening Statement
Nominations Hearing for Baranwal, McNamee, and Vela
Chairman Lisa Murkowski
November 15, 2018

Good morning, the committee will come to order. I'm told that our ranking member is making her way through the slush, and so recognizing that we a full hearing today we'll proceed without her, and hopefully she will be here shortly.

Before I begin, either with my opening or certainly before moving to our nominees this morning, I would just like to recognize that within this committee we have oversight of the Forest Service, those federal agencies that are involved with fighting our fires, wildfires across the country, and we recognize just the incredible damage, the loss of life, just the true tragedy in California at this time. So I would just ask members to just stop for one very short moment and recognize those whose lives have been lost, those who are in danger as they are working to protect our people and our properties, and just pause for one moment for those that are dealing with the current tragedy in California.

Thank you. So we are back this morning after our several week recess for the mid-term elections. We don't exactly know how long the lame duck session will last, but there's still plenty of work to do in the 115th Congress – particularly when it comes to nominations.

Our committee has spent a significant amount of time processing nominations in this Congress. And we're here today to consider three more: We have Dr. Rita Baranwal to be the Assistant Secretary of Energy for Nuclear Energy; Mr. Bernard McNamee to be a Commissioner on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission; and Mr. Raymond David Vela to be Director of the National Park Service.

I first want to speak to Dr. Baranwal. The position she has been nominated for is tasked with overseeing our nation's nuclear innovation and ensuring the long-term viability of our domestic nuclear industry. Should she be confirmed, she will have the opportunity to help shape the future of nuclear energy—not just here in the United States, but globally, as well.

She currently serves as the Director of the Gateway Accelerated Innovation in Nuclear program, known as "GAIN," at the Idaho National Lab. I'm certainly interested to know how her work has positioned her to reassert the United States as a world leader in advanced nuclear technology, which is one of my key priorities.

Mr. McNamee is back before the Committee. He's been here three times now, though this will be his first time as a nominee.

You previously appeared in a policy capacity for the Department of Energy, and I'm sure he will face a number of questions about the administration's efforts to provide economic relief to struggling coal and nuclear plants.

As we discussed when we met before the recess, FERC is an independent agency and must continue to function as such. The Commission's orders are never contingent on the Department of Energy's policy decisions. And in the meeting that I had with Mr. McNamee, I stressed the importance of maintaining FERC's autonomy and commitment to taking an independent role at FERC.

I'll note, when it comes to Mr. McNamee's nomination here, that this is not the first time we've had a nominee with policy experience at the federal and state levels. In fact, in this Congress alone, as we sought to establish a full quorum at FERC, we have confirmed two Senate staff to the Commission – Neil Chatterjee, who previously served as the Majority Leader's energy policy advisor, and Rich Glick, a former senior counsel for Senator Cantwell here on the committee.

And then our final nominee this morning, Mr. Vela, he has been nominated to be Director of the National Park Service, he would oversee some of our greatest national treasures. In order to ensure our parks are here for future generations, we must balance our ability to enjoy and explore them with our responsibility to keep and maintain them.

If he is confirmed, he will be responsible for leading the way in finding that balance. It's also expected that he would take on a wide range of issues facing the Park Service, from sexual harassment to the deferred maintenance backlog. I think it is significant to note that he would be the first Hispanic American confirmed to this position.

So I'd like to thank all those who have been nominated, thank them for their willingness to serve our country. If members have additional questions after our hearing concludes today for the record, we will close that out at the close of business hours today.

If these nominees prove qualified and have the requisite support, my plan is to report them to the full Senate shortly after Thanksgiving. I hope they can be confirmed, along with the seven nominees we already have pending on the calendar, before we adjourn for the year.

I really don't want to see all the good effort that this committee has put into advancing these nominees fall by the wayside. We need to do that, but also these agencies need these folks in place, they need to have the leadership teams, and I also recognize that these nominees have basically put their lives on hold during this process, so they deserve some certainty as well. So I would ask that you all work with me to clear the nominations in Energy's jurisdiction before the end of the year.

I will now turn to Senator Cantwell. After she has concluded her opening remarks, Senator Risch has asked to introduce Dr. Baranwal, Senator Cruz is with us to introduce Mr. McNamee, and Senator Cornyn will introduce Mr. Vela. Senator Cantwell?

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