

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following nomination: Executive Calendar No. 362.

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

The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of David J. Redl, of New York, to be Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nomination be printed in the RECORD.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Redl nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for 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.

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

VOTE EXPLANATION

• Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I was unavailable for rollcall vote No. 262, on the nomination of John H. Gibson, of Texas, to be Deputy Chief Management Officer of the Department of Defense. Had I been present, I would have voted yea.

Mr. President, I was unavailable for rollcall vote No. 263, on the motion to invoke cloture on Steven Andrew Engel, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Attorney General. Had I been present, I would have voted nay.

Mr. President, I was unavailable for rollcall vote No. 264, on the nomination of Steven Andrew Engel, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Attorney General. Had I been present, I would have voted nay.

Mr. President, I was unavailable for rollcall vote No. 265, on the motion to invoke cloture on Peter B. Robb, of Vermont, to be general counsel of the National Labor Relations Board. Had I been present, I would have voted nay. •

CONFIRMATION OF KYLE FORTSON

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, last week the Senate confirmed Kyle Fortson to be a member of the National Mediation Board.

The National Mediation Board, established by the 1934 amendments to the Railway Labor Act of 1926, is an independent U.S. Federal Government agency that facilitates labor-management relations within the Nation's railroad and airline industries.

Pursuant to the Railway Labor Act, National Mediation Board programs help to resolve disputes to promote the flow of interstate commerce in those industries through mediation, representation, and arbitration of labor-management disputes.

A dedicated public servant, Kyle Fortson is eminently qualified to serve on the National Mediation Board. I am fortunate to say that Mrs. Fortson currently serves on my staff as labor policy director at the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions—HELP—Committee, after serving in that position from 2010 to 2013 for Senator MIKE ENZI. I have benefitted from Mrs. Fortson's experience, knowledge, and counsel.

Mrs. Fortson previously served as labor counsel at the same committee from 2004 to 2010. Before that, she was a policy analyst at the Senate Republican Policy Committee from 2003 to 2004 and served as counsel to Senator Tim Hutchinson from 2001 to 2003. She also served as judiciary counsel to Congressman Spencer Bachus from 1999 to 2001.

Mrs. Fortson graduated with a B.A. in history from the University of Colorado in 1996 and with a J.D. from George Washington University in 1999.

Mrs. Fortson was nominated on June 26, 2017. On July 3, 2017, the committee received Mrs. Fortson's Office of Government Ethics paperwork, including her public financial disclosure and ethics agreement. Based on these documents, the Office of Government Ethics wrote to me that Kyle Fortson "is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest." The committee received Mrs. Fortson's HELP Committee application on July 27, 2017. Mrs. Fortson was favorably reported out of the HELP Committee on October 18, 2017.

While the National Mediation Board will be very fortunate to have Mrs. Fortson as a member, her departure will be a loss to the U.S. Senate and the HELP Committee. I am proud to support Kyle's nomination, and she will serve on the National Mediation Board with distinction.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today I wish to shine a spotlight on the increasingly dire political, security, and humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Senator BOOKER

and I, along with Senators DURBIN, COONS, WARREN, MARKEY, and BROWN, recently sent a letter to President Trump urging the administration to take immediate action to ensure that the United States is prepared to do our part to help stave off further violence and human suffering.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, or the DRC as it is known, is a country of vast natural resource wealth. It is the largest country in sub-Saharan Africa by land mass, with ample arable land, a variety of precious minerals, and the world's second-largest river, the Congo, which possesses substantial hydroelectric potential; yet, despite an abundance of natural resources—indeed, because of it—the people of the DRC have endured centuries of exploitation and atrocities. In the postcolonial era, the country has struggled with decades of conflict, endemic corruption, and extreme poverty. The DRC ranks 176th out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index. Life expectancy is 59 years. An estimated 77 percent of the people live on less than \$2 a day. More than 12 percent of children do not live to see their fifth birthday. Mothers die in childbirth in more than 7 out of every 1,000 live births. The statistics are truly alarming.

The 1997 to 2003 civil war involved at least seven countries in the region and, by some estimates, caused 5.4 million deaths from war and war-related causes. The conflict was characterized by massive human rights violations and introduced the world to the brutal consequences of the mining of conflict minerals. Eastern Congo has been referred to as the rape capital of the world, and sexual violence continues to be used as a weapon to traumatize and terrorize the population.

Despite the establishment of truth and reconciliation committees by the Sun City Accords in 2002, the installation of a unity government in 2003, and the deployment of the largest United Nations peacekeeping force in the world, the country remains unstable. The peacekeeping mission in DRC plays a critical role in protecting civilians in conflict areas and promoting stability; yet its capabilities are limited, and it is not a substitute for a political agreement respected and adhered to by all relevant stakeholders. Let me be clear: I fully support MONUSCO peacekeepers who seek to uphold their mandate. Though the mission has come under criticism over the years for not doing enough to protect civilians and for controversies regarding its own abuses, we must ask ourselves what would have happened—and what might still happen—if the UN were not present—or if the United States forces such significant troop reductions that the mission is rendered ineffective, which I fear we may be perilously close to doing.