



Opening Statement
Nominations Hearing for Walker and Winberg
Chairman Lisa Murkowski
September 26, 2017

Good morning and welcome, everyone. I apologize for being a couple minutes late this morning.

We have the opportunity this morning to continue our hearing on nominations, and we have two nominees before us today for the Department of Energy. Before I introduce, I just want to take a moment this morning to reiterate that the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, all who were affected by hurricanes Irma and Maria, certainly remain in our thoughts and in our prayers. I do hope that we'll have the opportunity to visit the islands in the next several weeks to get a better assessment, determine how we here in congress can help with their recoveries.

I also intend to hold a hearing on the situation in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands as they recover. I think we're all very cognizant of the fact that we don't need to be pulling FEMA out or the governors out right now to come to Washington D.C. for a hearing, so I think it is important to allow them to focus on their recovery efforts right now, so the timing of that is still not locked in – but I think it is important to allow the situation on the ground to stabilize and ensure that the island leaders can be participating in it. As an appropriator I certainly will look forward to, to be there of assistance to make sure that these islands receive the help they need – in the time frame that they need.

I think we all recognize that this is a very, very bad and difficult situation, so I want the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, just like the people of Florida and Texas and the Gulf Coast to know that they are not forgotten and that we stand in unity with them and that we will be working with them to help them get back on their feet.

Again, today we are here to consider two nominees for the Department of Energy – Bruce Walker to be Assistant Secretary for Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability, and Steven Winberg to be Assistant Secretary for Fossil Energy. These are critical leadership positions at the Department and I want to thank both nominees for their willingness to serve our country.

Here on the committee, we certainly recognize the importance of the Department of Energy. DOE has helped make our nation a global technology leader by supporting basic research, encouraging scientific exploration, and fostering innovation. The Department is also meant to be our chief advocate for energy supply, which affects everything from our national

security to market stability and prices. So I encourage both nominees to work with the administration, and with Congress, to increase access to energy, to make it more affordable, and to continue to improve its environmental performance.

One of my top priorities is finding ways to address our high energy prices for those who live in our rural areas – and certainly in Alaska, we know what we’re talking about here. We have so many of our communities that still rely on diesel as their primary energy source—a fuel that has to be brought in, often times flown in, costing as much as nine, ten bucks a gallon. To say it is a burden on our villages is an understatement.

I enjoyed having Deputy Secretary Brouillette in Alaska in August, and we discussed this issue at length during that trip. What he saw is that there is a genuine need for help in Alaska. He also saw that in Alaska we can be the perfect ‘proving ground’ if you will. If a new technology makes sense anywhere, it should make sense in a high cost state like Alaska. So what we are looking for, going forward, is for the Department to take the next step, to look at both our challenges and our opportunities, and to form meaningful partnerships with communities and organizations in Alaska that will lead to lower energy costs.

I also want to see the Department work with our state to help us bring more of our resources to market. That includes renewables, which we have in great abundance, from hydropower to wind to biomass. It also includes our stranded natural gas, and resources with significant potential like methane hydrates. The Office of Fossil Energy has focused almost exclusively on the environmental aspects of fuels in recent years, but its mission is supposed to be considerably broader than that, so I will be looking for greater balance in this area.

For members who have questions for our nominees, I will be here for as long as we need to process these questions today. If any members have additional questions after the hearing, questions for the record will be due at the close of business today. As usual, it is my intent to report these nominees as soon as possible.

I would also note to colleagues that we now have a total of nine nominees who have already been favorably reported from our committee who are awaiting confirmation by the full Senate. That includes three nominees for the Department of Energy, four for the Department of the Interior, and two for FERC.

We need to get moving on these nominations. Secretary Zinke and Secretary Perry need their teams in place, whether it’s to help with hurricane recovery and a variety of other tasks. After months without a quorum, FERC needs its full complement of five commissioners. So I would encourage members to recognize the importance of confirming these individuals, and will certainly be working to secure their approval this week and for as long as it takes. So with that I will now turn to you, Senator Cantwell, for your opening remarks. And then, we will swear in our witnesses and proceed with their statements.

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