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<https://goo.gl/HiZovi>

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A private meeting in a third-floor Capitol hideaway office yesterday between Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and Senate Democrats has started freeing up stalled Interior Department nominees.

<https://goo.gl/tgqPHn>

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1. Trump expected to shrink Grand Staircase-Escalante by half

Published: Wednesday, November 15, 2017

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke will propose cutting Utah's Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by about half, according to an aide to Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah).

President Trump is expected to follow the recommendation to shrink the monument from 1.2 million to 700,000 acres, Ron Dean, one of Hatch's Utah staffers, told the state Legislature's Commission for the Stewardship of Public Lands yesterday.

Dean also confirmed an earlier indication from Zinke that Bears Ears National Monument will be altered to between 100,000 and 300,000 acres, down from its current size of 1.35 million acres (*Greenwire*, Nov. 14).

Dean warned, however, that Congress would need to make permanent changes to the Antiquities Act to make sure future presidents cannot reverse any alterations Trump makes to the monuments.

"We are going to get a pingpong effect should the president lose and the wrong kind of occupant of the White House, who has a different view of what public lands in the West are all about," Dean said. "There is a substantial fear that, especially in Bears Ears' case, it would be even be larger than originally called for by President Obama."

Environmentalists and state Democrats panned the review process and said both Utah monuments have provided an economic boon for the surrounding areas.

"The fact that we're learning as much about the president's review from Sen. Hatch as we are from the White House shows that the real decisions about these monuments are being made in secret," said Chris Saeger, executive director of the Western Values Project (Brian Maffly, *Salt Lake Tribune*, Nov. 14). — NS

<https://goo.gl/HiZovi>

2. First Bundy arguments test if boring or bombastic works on jury

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LAS VEGAS — The jurors who will determine the fate of Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy received their first taste of the trial yesterday, as attorneys in the case offered starkly different characterizations of the 71-year-old, who has long sparred with the federal government.

In their opening arguments, both acting U.S. Attorney Steven Myhre and defense attorney Bret Whipple focused on Bundy's long feud with the Bureau of Land Management leading up to the 2014 armed standoff with federal agents near Bunkerville, Nev.

But the similarities ended there.

Myhre, who spoke in a monotone from behind a lectern, began with a lengthy review of Bundy's refusal to pay grazing fees to BLM since 1994, and the subsequent court order that added fines to his grazing fees in 1998.

"They tried to find a way to resolve this ... but nothing worked," Myhre said in an opening statement that spanned hours. "He continued to refuse to obey the court order."

Bundy's "mission became to stop the BLM and drive them out of Bunkerville," including by having supporters bring guns there, Myhre told jurors.

In a presentation that differed from Myhre's in tone as much as message, Whipple — who used a wireless microphone to pace and at times shouted his remarks — sought to show jurors a frustrated Nevada rancher whose dispute with BLM drew supporters thanks to a series of viral videos.

"Cliven Bundy has been telling BLM, 'I'll do whatever it takes,' for the last 25 years," Whipple said. "And it's always been peaceful."

The 2014 standoff was sparked when BLM attempted to seize Bundy's cattle over more than \$1 million in unpaid grazing fees and fines. Bundy, his sons Ammon and Ryan, and Montana resident Ryan Payne face a variety of misdemeanor and felony charges, including conspiracy, threatening federal officials and firearms charges.

Myhre referred to repeated court orders for Cliven Bundy to seize the cattle and sell the animals to pay the debt.

"Mr. Bundy, with the help of his sons and co-defendants ... reached out to militia [groups] and brought guns to Nevada," Myhre added, as he displayed pictures of other defendants in the case. They included Eric Parker, who recently pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor offense, with large rifles and other firearms during the standoff (*E&E News PM*, Oct. 23).

Myhre focused in particular on the April 12 standoff in a wash beneath a freeway overpass, asserting that images of heavily armed BLM agents showed only that the government was raising its weapons in defense.

He also pre-emptively dismissed defense arguments that because no shots were fired during the incident, it should be viewed as a nonviolent protest.

"The issue is the BLM officers being threatened and intimidated and interfered with," Myhre said.

He later added: "This case is not about protesting. It is about the use of violence. ... It is not about the messaging."

In a reference to the government's failure to convict the seven leaders of the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon — which also included Ammon and Ryan Bundy — Myhre rounded out his remarks by explaining that conspiracy allegations do not necessarily mean jurors will be shown a "Godfather" moment, referring to the classic film.

Instead, he instructed jurors to consider Cliven Bundy, his sons and co-defendants in the context of a sports team.

"Think of it as a pick-up basketball game: There's one goal, scoring that basket," he said.

But whether Myhre's detailed presentation impressed jurors will remain to be seen. At least one female juror fell asleep during the proceedings, and at one point had to be woken up by the court's deputy clerk.

‘Just didn’t smell right’

Whipple opened his remarks with a brief history of the Bundy ranch, as well as the state of Nevada and Clark County.

He also briefly rebutted accusations that the Bundy cattle are "feral," asserting instead that the animals are hearty, independent and strong. "They're very resilient cattle," he said.

Whipple also sought to reframe Bundy's long-running dispute with BLM as a battle "over the natural resources of Clark County," pointing to his ownership of several springs on the rangeland.

"He knows he doesn't own the land," Whipple said, although he did not wade into Bundy's theory that the U.S. Constitution bans the federal government from owning vast Western lands. "He has a right to the range because he's used it for so long."

Whipple also compared Bundy's refusal to pay grazing fees and public statements criticizing BLM to opposition to locating nuclear waste in the state's Yucca Mountain.

"They protest in a lawful manner to anyone who will listen," Whipple said.

Instead, Whipple asserted that several videos, including one of BLM agents tackling Cliven Bundy's son Dave to the ground as they alleged he attempted to block a road, spurred supporters to the Bunkerville ranch.

"They saw something that just didn't smell right. Because being an American means you can help when you want to," Whipple said.

Whipple also vowed to make the "conduct" of former BLM Special Agent in Charge Dan Love a "central focus" of the defense.

"You will see that Dan Love's conduct is what created April 12," Whipple said, referring to standoff between federal agents and hundreds of armed and unarmed protesters.

Love is no longer a BLM employee following an Interior Department inspector general's report that found Love mishandled evidence in a separate criminal case and directed agency staff to delete incriminating emails in another matter ([*Greenwire*](#), Sept. 18).

The trial is set to resume this morning. Attorneys for Ammon Bundy or Payne may opt to make their opening arguments then, or could wait until the defense rests its case.

Ryan Bundy, who was freed to a halfway house on Monday night, is representing himself in the trial, and will likewise have the option to make his opening argument tomorrow or wait several weeks ([*Greenwire*](#), Nov. 14).

Yesterday's opening arguments followed two delays, including a postponement over additional evidence last week, after the jury of 12 individuals and four alternates had already been selected.

Chief U.S. District Court Judge Gloria Navarro has said the trial is expected to last four months.

<https://goo.gl/qiB1eM>

3. 'What is this about?' Ryan Bundy asks in defending himself

Jennifer Yachnin, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, November 15, 2017

LAS VEGAS — Nevada resident Ryan Bundy today outlined his version of the events that led to the 2014 armed standoff with federal agents at his family's Bunkerville ranch, suggesting to jurors that his family was the target of a government conspiracy to force them from their 160-acre ranch.

Bundy, who is serving as his own attorney in the criminal trial, addressed a panel of 16 jurors for nearly 90 minutes as he made his opening arguments.

"I feel it's important that if you judge me, you get to know me," said Bundy, who was dressed in a dark suit and tie as he read from handwritten remarks on a yellow legal pad.

He opened his remarks by offering an idyllic view of the Bunkerville ranch, telling jurors to picture themselves on horseback and recalling sunsets and moonrises. He displayed a photo of his family — including wife Angela, six daughters and two sons — which remained on television screens in the room for the duration of his remarks.

Bundy then shifted to the heart of the trial. He and his father, Cliven Bundy; brother Ammon Bundy; and Montana resident Ryan Payne are charged with various misdemeanor and felony charges, including conspiracy, threatening federal officials and firearms charges stemming from the 2014 standoff.

In early 2014, the Bureau of Land Management attempted to seize Cliven Bundy's cattle over more than \$1 million in unpaid grazing fees and fines, with the intention of auctioning off the animals to pay those fines. The incident ended in an armed standoff with hundreds of militia members and individuals who had descended on Bunkerville to support the Bundys.

But Ryan Bundy rejected descriptions by federal prosecutors of the Bundys' long-running refusal to pay grazing fines for the use of public lands or to comply with court orders that added subsequent fines.

"They say this issue is over grazing fees. ... I'll tell you what, this case has nothing to do with the grazing fees," Ryan Bundy said. "You don't pay rent when you own your home. That lands belongs to the people of the state of Nevada. We own the grazing rights."

Bundy said that his family's is the only ranch left from among more than 50 that grazed cattle in the area in the early 1990s, when BLM sought to move ranchers off a grazing allotment to protect the endangered Mojave population of the desert tortoise.

"You only have which rights you're willing to fight for," Bundy said and later added: "The government asserts there are no rights, only privileges. And if we're not paying for the privileges, we cannot be there."

He also alleged that his father saw signs in local BLM offices in the 1990s with slogans like "Cattle Free by '93" and "No More Moo by '92." A *Desert News* article from 1990 reported that those slogans were actually created by the environmental group Earth First.

"My father could see the BLM wasn't there to help manage his ranch. They were there to manage him out of business," Bundy said.

Despite Bundy's assertion, however, many of the former ranches in the area participated in the creation of Clark County's habitat conservation plan, which included funds for the purchase or trade of grazing allotments (*Greenwire*, Oct. 6).

Bundy also criticized the cost of the trial and the 2014 cattle impoundment efforts, arguing that both would cost millions of dollars, and compared it with the approximately \$100,000 in unpaid grazing fees his family owes.

"Makes you wonder what it is about. What is this about?" Bundy asked.

Bundy touched on his family's assertion that the U.S. government cannot own broad swaths of public lands, as it does in Nevada and other Western states.

"Our view of the Constitution is the land belongs to the state and the people, and that right there is the crux," he said.

Bundy later noted that his family did attempt to pay its grazing fees by submitting them to Clark County in the mid-1990s.

"If we need to pay a fee — which again, I've explained is not necessary — we are going to pay Clark County," Bundy said.

Bundy also questioned the fact that federal agencies may maintain their own law enforcement divisions, including armed officers.

"They want to call these guys law enforcement, they're just BLM employees," he said.

Bundy also rejected federal prosecutors' description of his family as potentially dangerous and references to Cliven Bundy's repeated vows to do anything necessary to protect his ranch.

"My family and I have been charged with some pretty serious things. ... The evidence will show, or will prove, they're not true," Ryan Bundy said. "My family is not a violent family, I'm not a violent man."

He pleaded for jurors to listen to the trial with "the spirit of the Lord," before inviting the jurors to visit the Bundy ranch following the end of the trial.

"I'm not afraid of the truth — the truth will set me free," Bundy said. "When this is over, I invite you to come out. We don't claim ownership to the land. ... We recognize your right to be there."

Both federal prosecutors and Bret Whipple, the defense attorney for Cliven Bundy, presented their opening arguments yesterday (*Greenwire*, Nov. 15). Attorneys for Payne are expected to make their opening arguments when the court reconvenes this afternoon.

Attorneys for Ammon Bundy indicated today that they plan to wait to offer opening arguments until the prosecution has rested its case, likely within six to eight weeks. Defense attorney Daniel Hill said the decision rested on the fact that additional emails and other evidence could still be produced under a court order.

Chief U.S. District Judge Gloria Navarro has said the trial is expected to last four months.

<https://goo.gl/jXXG4v>

4. Trump's 'energy dominance' transforms Alaska's future

Margaret Kriz Hobson and Pamela King, E&E News reporters

Published: Wednesday, November 15, 2017

Nov. 8, 2016, was a time of triumph and hope for Alaska Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski as she watched election results with a crowd of supporters at 49th State Brewing Co.'s brewpub in downtown Anchorage.

Murkowski easily won re-election. Then the GOP held control of the U.S. Senate, giving Murkowski another chance to help shape federal policy as chairwoman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

But the final coup came well into the evening when the networks flashed news alerts reporting the results of the presidential race: Republican Donald Trump had won.

Murkowski hadn't supported Trump. But that didn't matter on election night as the Alaska Republican confidently asserted that the new president would pave the way for oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Now, a year later, the Republicans are closer than ever to opening ANWR to drilling.

Today, Murkowski's committee is due to mark up her bill allowing exploration in the Arctic refuge's coastal plain. If the measure is approved by Congress, it would almost certainly be signed into law by the president (*E&E Daily*, Nov. 9).

In the year since Trump's election, the federal government has begun a radical reversal of President Obama's ambitious wildlife preservation policies for Alaska.

During his eight years in the White House, Obama blocked seismic studies on ANWR's coastal plain. He outlawed oil and gas development in most of the Arctic Ocean and in Bristol Bay along Alaska's southwestern coast. And he placed almost half of the 22.8-million-acre National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) off-limits to development.

In total, Obama preserved at least 170 million acres of federal lands in Alaska.

But all that is changing under Trump. As Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke declared in May, today Alaska "is open for business."

While Congress considers the ANWR legislation, Trump administration geologists are beginning a new analysis of the amount of oil and gas available in the Arctic reserve.

At the same time, Zinke is taking steps to expand hydrocarbon development in the NPR-A. And he's paving the way for oil and gas leasing in the U.S. Arctic Ocean.

Trump's pro-development agenda for Alaska has shifted the balance of power from environmental advocates, who helped orchestrate Obama's land preservation policies, to Alaska state leaders and business interests eager to clear the road for more resource extraction.

But environmental organizations are fighting back, vowing to use the courts to thwart Trump's extraction plans for Alaska.

Kristen Monsell, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity, said environmental activists are prepared to "fight every step of the way" against Trump's plan to expand industry activity in the Last Frontier.

"The administration is turning over some of the most pristine lands we have left to the oil companies so that they can suck the dirty fossil fuels out of the far reaches of our country," she argued. "That's just unacceptable."

According to Nicole Whittington-Evans, Alaska regional director for the Wilderness Society, "[t]he question really is: Do we have a desire as a nation to protect certain parts of the Arctic? Or should Alaska's entire North Slope be open to oil and gas development?"

"Because that's what we're looking at with the Trump administration," she said. "That's really what's at play right now."

Many questions about ANWR

ANWR has been the first big Alaska issue to attract the public attention since Trump's election.

For more than 20 years, the Alaska congressional delegation has repeatedly introduced legislation to open the reserve's 1.5-million-acre coastal plain to oil development. Each time they were undercut by Washington Democrats and conservationists who consider ANWR to be the Holy Grail of the environmental movement.

Murkowski's new ANWR legislation has the best chance yet of winning congressional approval, primarily because it's being advanced through the budget reconciliation process. As a result, the Republican-controlled Senate can adopt the measure by a simple majority vote, making it difficult for opponents to block oil drilling in the refuge.

However, oil companies may not be interested in bidding on oil and gas leases on the coastal plain until they have a better understanding of the region's potential hydrocarbon reserves.

Currently there is scant information on how much recoverable oil and gas are available in those lands. In 1986, a consortium of oil companies drilled a single well in northeastern ANWR, 15 miles from the village of Kaktovik. But the results of that probe are among Alaska's best-kept secrets.

In 1998, the U.S. Geological Survey calculated that ANWR's coastal plain, together with nearby Native lands and adjacent state waters, could hold between 5.7 billion and 16 billion barrels of recoverable oil.

Now Zinke has ordered USGS researchers to reassess the coastal plain, also known as the 1002 area, by reprocessing decades-old 2-D seismic data and examining data collected on wells sunk just outside of the Arctic reserve. That analysis is due for release late next year.

Even if Murkowski's ANWR bill becomes law, some industry analysts doubt that the coastal plain will attract industry investment due to continued low oil prices and the high cost of operating in the remote, frigid Arctic.

Raymond James & Associates analyst Pavel Molchanov predicted that "even if ANWR were to go through in Congress, which is very debatable on political grounds, the practical impact would be negligible."

"There has been no drilling historically in ANWR, which means all the infrastructure has to be built from scratch, making it a high-cost area that is high-risk to drill," Molchanov said.

But not everyone agrees. Former USGS Director Mark Myers noted that oil industry infrastructure is already in place a few miles west of the Arctic refuge at Exxon Mobil Corp.'s Point Thomson oil and gas facility.

The Exxon operation includes an oil processing facility and a pipeline with the capacity to move 70,000 barrels of oil per day. Right now, the company is shipping less than 10,000 barrels of liquid natural gas condensate each day to the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System.

Meyers, who also served as the state of Alaska's natural resources commissioner, predicted that passage of Murkowski's ANWR bill would spur oil companies to conduct a new round of 3-D seismic studies in the coastal plain.

"I think if companies have confidence in the administration actually holding a lease sale, there would be enough interest in the industry certainly to shoot the seismic," he predicted.

However, continued fierce environmental opposition to ANWR development could result in expensive lawsuits and delays for potential developers, noted Alison Wolters, upstream researcher for Wood Mackenzie's Canada/Alaska group.

"I think that any operator that's interested in ANWR would come up against some pretty serious roadblocks," Wolters suggested. "Those might be able to be overcome, but it would definitely require some commitment."

Oil discoveries spur interest in NPR-A

Even before Trump's election, the oil industry was taking a harder look at the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska thanks to three massive new oil discoveries in and around federal lands in the northwestern corner of the state.

Two years ago, Armstrong Energy LLC discovered 1.2 billion barrels of recoverable oil at its Nanushuk leases east of NPR-A. Armstrong recently sold a significant stake in that field to Oil Search Ltd., an oil and gas company operating in Papua New Guinea.

Early this year, ConocoPhillips Alaska announced a 300-million-barrel oil find at its leases within NPR-A. In addition, Caelus Energy LLC reported the discovery of roughly 2 billion barrels of recoverable oil at its state leases just north of the petroleum reserve. However, due to financial issues, the company has suspended plans to drill an appraisal well at the Smith Bay site this winter.

Now USGS is conducting a new geological assessment of the oil and gas potential of NPR-A and the surrounding regions. That report is due to be released in the coming weeks.

Meanwhile, the Bureau of Land Management has scheduled a Dec. 6 lease sale for all NPR-A lands available for oil and gas development under the existing federal management plan.

However, this year's NPR-A lease sale isn't likely to attract aggressive bidding because ConocoPhillips scooped up much of the petroleum reserve's most promising lands at last year's BLM auction, Wood MacKenzie's Wolters observed.

Bidding would mushroom if more petroleum reserve lands were available for oil and gas leasing. But no additional territory can be offered until Interior rewrites the Obama-era integrated activity plan for NPR-A, which will take years to complete.

ConocoPhillips and other companies are particularly interested in exploring lands near Teshekpuk Lake, which are now protected as critical habitat. That 3.65-million-acre special area is located directly west of ConocoPhillips' latest oil discovery.

Long path to 'energy dominance'

Trump's drive to increase oil and gas development in Alaska is part of his "energy dominance" campaign for the nation. In most cases, rolling back Obama's land preservation initiatives will require the administration to rewrite existing federal regulations, a process that can take years to complete.

But three months after his inauguration, Trump took direct action by issuing an executive order that reversed Obama's ban on oil drilling in much of the Arctic Ocean and part of the Atlantic Ocean.

That step was immediately challenged by a coalition of environmental groups. In a lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court for the District of Alaska, the environmentalists charged that the president doesn't have the legal authority to reverse Obama's protections for the Arctic and Atlantic offshore areas (*Energywire*, Nov. 9).

Even if the Trump administration prevails in that lawsuit, however, the oil industry isn't likely to bid for leases in the Chukchi Sea because of the long shadow of Royal Dutch Shell PLC's disastrous Arctic drilling program.

Shell invested seven years and more than \$7 billion in hopes of finding a mother lode of oil in the Chukchi. But in 2015, the company announced that it had found insufficient oil and gas at its leases. Shell shuttered its Arctic exploration program and left Alaska.

Today, the Chukchi Sea remains an anathema to the oil industry. "I think that it's just so expensive, it's just so remote," Wood MacKenzie's Wolters said. "I don't see any action there in the foreseeable future, even with a supportive administration."

But the Beaufort Sea might be a different story. Oil companies are already pumping crude from state and federal Beaufort Sea leases that are located close to Alaska's northern coast. In addition, two more offshore petroleum development projects are already on the drawing board for the area.

The Trump administration is fast-tracking regulatory review of Hilcorp Alaska LLC's oil development project at its Liberty leases and Italian company Eni SpA's proposal to explore for oil at its Nikaitchuq North unit.

Those ventures are located in a 2.8-million-acre sliver of Beaufort Sea waters that was excluded from Obama's sweeping executive order protecting the American Arctic.

But Interior cannot auction new leases in the Chukchi or Beaufort seas until regulators rewrite the government's five-year offshore oil and gas leasing plan, which now excludes all Arctic leasing. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management has already begun developing a new leasing plan for 2019-2024.

Wolters predicted that with oil prices not expected to go over \$70 per barrel through 2020, "explorers are going to take another look at mature basins and what has been passed over in the past that would be a lower-cost target that they could go after now."

In Alaska, that's likely to mean more oil and gas development in NPR-A and on state lands.

But although Trump is moving quickly to open more of Alaska's hydrocarbon-rich lands to development, the final industry drilling decisions will be based on each company's long-term investment strategies.

"People like to have the conversation about oil prices, but that lacks any strategic understanding of what any company is looking at," noted Chris Guith, senior vice president for policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Global Energy Institute.

"These are multibillion-dollar investments with multidecade timelines."

<https://goo.gl/7X738q>

5. Durbin lifts hold after Senate Dems privately press Zinke

Michael Doyle, Nick Sobczyk and Geof Koss, E&E News reporters

Published: Wednesday, November 15, 2017

A private meeting in a third-floor Capitol hideaway office yesterday between Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and Senate Democrats has started freeing up stalled Interior Department nominees.

The session convened at 3 p.m. by Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) gave several lawmakers a chance to press Zinke on the Trump administration's controversial review of national monuments. Zinke, in turn, wants Durbin to release a hold on several nominees.

Durbin said today he's already lifted one or two holds that have blocked nominees.

"I don't do these punishment holds forever," Durbin said, explaining that he "wanted a meeting, an exchange of information."

Senators made clear they still want more information; implicitly or explicitly, that now appears to be the key to unlocking the remaining nominations.

"The secretary stated he would be responding to the public comments the department received on the review," Durbin said afterward. "I look forward to reviewing those responses."

In addition to the Democratic whip, the meeting's participants included Sens. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-Nev.) and Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.). Heinrich declined to comment after leaving the meeting.

Last week, Durbin had bluntly warned Interior officials that his "hold on Department of Interior nominees will continue" at least until Zinke's schedule could accommodate a meeting on Capitol Hill with Senate Democrats (*E&E Daily*, Nov. 9).

Interior spokeswoman Heather Swift said today that Zinke has been "totally transparent with senators [whom] the monument review impacted," citing meetings and telephone calls with Western lawmakers whose states include national monuments (*Greenwire*, Nov. 8).

Durbin's home state of Illinois does not contain any national monument potentially affected by the Trump administration's review, although it does have the urban Pullman National Monument in Chicago. Still, Durbin voices strong support for monuments found elsewhere.

"I am concerned that President Trump plans to shrink Bears Ears National Monument [in Utah] by approximately 80 percent," Durbin said after yesterday's meeting. "It is clear that this decision is not based on protecting some of the most extraordinary natural resources in our nation, but rather on protecting political alliances."

Earlier this year, Trump ordered a review of all monuments created since 1996 via the Antiquities Act. A leaked report shows that Zinke recommended shrinking at least six monuments and making management changes at several others. Trump has not yet announced a final decision (*Greenwire*, Nov. 3).

On Oct. 23, Durbin, along with Heinrich and Democratic Sens. Jeff Merkley of Oregon and Tom Udall of New Mexico, asked Zinke to meet with them in Durbin's office to discuss the national monuments review.

"We continue to be very concerned about your efforts to remove protections from America's most treasured places by rescinding national monument designations," the senators wrote, adding that they wanted more than just a single meeting.

The Democrats said then that until their requests were met, they would "reserve the right to object to nominees for the Department of the Interior being confirmed."

Brenda Burman has been waiting more than four months since Trump announced her nomination as commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation. Susan Combs has likewise been waiting more than four months since her nomination as assistant Interior secretary for policy, management and budget.

Combs and Burman were both approved by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on Aug. 3.

Joseph Balash has been waiting more than three months since his nomination as assistant secretary for land and minerals management, as has Ryan Nelson since his nomination as Interior solicitor.

<https://goo.gl/tgqPHn>