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NOMINATIONS

Dems lift hold on Interior pick, keep block on another

Kellie Lunney and George Cahlink, E&E News reporters

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Senate Minority Whip Dick Durbin said yesterday he removed his hold on an Interior assistant secretary nominee but hasn't relinquished his lock on the department solicitor pick yet.

"I am down to one [hold]," Durbin told E&E News, referring to Ryan Nelson, the president's choice for Interior's top lawyer.

The Illinois Democrat confirmed he had lifted his hold on Susan Combs, nominated to serve as Interior's assistant secretary for policy, management and budget.

Susan Combs. Gage Skidmore/Wikipedia

Asked why he hasn't discarded the hold on Nelson, Durbin said he was waiting for the department to provide more information about the protection of historic and archaeological sites, and surveys within the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments in Utah.

"We are hoping to get that information soon," Durbin said, adding that he also is "trying to make sure we have a working relationship with the secretary of Interior."

Interior press secretary Heather Swift said she didn't know what Durbin was seeking, in response to questions on the nomination hold and the Democrat's request for more information on Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante.

Earlier this month, President Trump issued two proclamations significantly shrinking the acreage of those two monuments.

Those decisions were based on Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's recommendations as part of a larger review of national monuments ([*Greenwire*](#), Dec. 4).

Durbin previously had a hold on the nomination of Alaskan Joe Balash, whom the Senate last week confirmed as Interior's assistant secretary for land and minerals management ([*Greenwire*](#), Dec. 7).

The Democrat lifted his hold though in November after working with Republican Sen. Dan Sullivan of Alaska to secure a meeting with Zinke and other Democrats about the department's controversial national monuments review.

Sullivan said he worked with Durbin to broker the meeting with Zinke, and the minority whip "in good faith" agreed to move on Balash.

Durbin also said yesterday that it was "entirely possible" that the impasse over the Interior nomination is resolved by the end of the year.

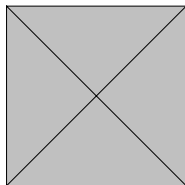
Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), chairwoman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, earlier this week said she wanted to get the five pending nominations cleared by her committee, including Combs and Nelson, included in any year-end nominations deal (***E&E Daily***, Dec. 13).

EPA, NRC

Separately yesterday, the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee said they were working together on a deal to allow two U.S. EPA nominees — David Ross, tapped to lead EPA's water office, and Matt Leopold, Trump's pick for the agency's general counsel — to move forward quickly (***E&E News PM***, Dec. 13).

Chairman John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) and ranking member Tom Carper (D-Del.) also are working on moving Trump's picks to join the Nuclear Regulatory Commission — Annie Caputo and David Wright, along with Jeff Baran, a current member who was renominated for a new term starting next year.

Carper had recently said his side was willing to be more open to administration picks if Republicans would give up on EPA chemicals nominee Michael Dourson. He withdrew yesterday (***Greenwire***, Dec. 13).



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