

Interior pick faces tough questioning

Wyden among the critics

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The former oil and gas lobbyist nominated to head the Interior Department faced tough questioning today from Senate Democrats about whether he suppressed staff warnings about the impact of agency decision-making on endangered species.

David Bernhardt appeared before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which is considering his nomination. Bernhardt has been serving as Interior’s acting secretary since Ryan Zinke’s resignation in December amid ethics allegations.

Bernhardt told senators he aimed to keep “working to reduce regulatory burdens without sacrificing environmental outcomes.”

Sen. Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, cited Interior documents recently made public under the federal Freedom of Information Act that he said showed Bernhardt’s agency suppressed internal findings about the impact that recent Interior decisions on pesticides would have on wildlife.

“You’ve meddled with the science, you’ve inserted yourself in the scientific process,” Wyden said.

Bernhardt responded that he made those decisions in accordance with advice from the department’s lawyers.

Wyden also spoke critically of Bernhardt’s past lobbying work for clients with business before Interior, saying they made it impossible for Bernhardt to impartially decide a host of regulatory matters dealing with the public resources under Interior’s control.

“I think you are so conflicted,” Wyden said. “You’re either going to



David Bernhardt, President Donald Trump’s nominee to head the Interior Department, is promising to cut regulation for businesses without sacrificing environmental interests.

AP Photo/David Zalubowski

have to disqualify yourself from so many matters I don’t know how you’re going to spend your day” or violate ethical standards by not recusing himself from decisions on clients.

Asked by Sen. Joe Manchin, a West Virginia Democrat, if he would take himself out of regulatory dealings involving past clients when a one-year mandatory recusal period wraps up soon, Bernhardt pushed back.

“I have a really particular skill set” for the job, Bernhardt argued. “I’m basically handcuffed if I am recusing myself. And I don’t think that really is the best strategy.”

“I’m actually pretty good at going

up against these guys, and I’m pretty good at it,” he said, referring to industry interests. “And I would say you want to have your A quarterback on the team.”

Sen. Cory Gardner, a Colorado Republican, defended Bernhardt, saying his past work for industries and previous stints as a senior staffer at Interior gave him valuable experience.

Bernhardt was nominated by President Donald Trump, who has said he “has done a fantastic job from the day he arrived.” Bernhardt, a Colorado native, first served in the department under President George W. Bush.

Supreme Court won’t stop enforcement of bump stock ban

By JESSICA GRESKO
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court today declined to stop the Trump administration from enforcing its ban on bump stock devices, which allow semi-automatic weapons to fire like machine guns.

The ban took effect Tuesday.

Gun rights groups asked the court to keep the government from enforcing the ban for now. Chief Justice John Roberts declined one request for the court to get involved on Tuesday and a second request was declined by the court today. That was the only remaining request. The justices didn’t say anything in declining it.

The Trump administration’s ban puts it in the unusual position of arguing against gun rights groups.

President Donald Trump said last year that the government would move to ban bump stocks. The action followed a 2017 shooting in Las Vegas in which a gunman attached bump stocks to assault-style rifles he used to shoot concertgoers from his hotel room. By using

the devices, which allow shots to be fired more rapidly, the gunman was able to fire more than 1,000 rounds in 11 minutes. Fifty-eight people were killed and hundreds were injured.

The Trump administration’s move was an about-face for the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. In 2010, under the Obama administration, the ATF found that the devices were legal. But under the Trump administration, officials revisited that determination and found it incorrect.

The revised regulation, which went into effect Tuesday, requires owners either to destroy their bump stocks or surrender them. The government estimates hundreds of thousands of the devices have been sold.

The revised regulation was met with resistance from gun rights advocates, and several lawsuits were filed to try to stop the ATF from enforcing the ban. But lower courts have so far declined to keep the administration from moving forward with the ban, and the Supreme Court declined to get involved to halt it.

Earthquake: Report will be submitted to state on how to improve readiness

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Transportation Command, the federal agency charged with ensuring viable infrastructure for military operations.

The team will assemble a report with some ideas for the state to improve readiness, Massey said.

Mary McArthur, the executive director of the Columbia-Pacific Economic Development District, has been creating a strategic plan the Port needs to get more state financing to help fix crumbling infrastructure. The visit by the feds could potentially lead to federal support for disaster preparedness, with the Port as a hub of recovery at the mouth of the Columbia River.

“In talking to Business Oregon, their sense is that Pier 1 is probably the strongest of the piers,” she told the Port Commission earlier this month. “They



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

A team of experts will visit in April to assess the Port’s capacity to assist after an earthquake.

think that, potentially, it could withstand the earthquake. Whether or not it would be ripped apart if the wave came up the river

and just lifted it off the bank, that’s another issue. But there is value, potentially, in access to federal dollars.”

The Port has been largely absent from emergency planning in Clatsop County.

Jim Knight, the Port’s



Passengers disembark a cruise ship at the Port of Astoria in 2018.

executive director, sees the visit as an example of how important federal agencies think the Port is in recovering from a large earthquake, and as a potential route to federal support. The Port has been trying to get a large amount of disaster relief funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for damage claims from December 2015 storms.

“We’re the corner-

stone,” Knight told the Port Commission earlier this month. “We are the connection north and south and east and west. That’s why they’ve identified the Port as being critical.

“Whether that turns into money to prepare ... it’s a step in the right direction, but that’s unknown, how much money we’ll be able to get from Homeland Security.”

Director: Agency employs between 20 and 30 people, including maintenance and security

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McGrath was one of the last remaining administrative hires by Michael Weston, the Port’s former interim executive director, along with executive assistant Judy Fattori.

Most of the administrative staff has now been

hired under Knight, who said the agency employs between 20 and 30 people, including maintenance and security.

Administrative hires under Knight include finance director Will Isom, finance manager Jim Grey, terminal services manager Susan Transue, assis-

tant property manager Lori Agalzoff, environmental compliance specialist Erin McDonnell, accounts receivable specialist Kate Fleischmann and administrative assistant Ella Marion.

“I’m so proud of this team, how they’re pulling together,” Knight said.

County: ‘I think there maybe is a misunderstanding on what free speech is’

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What’s our agreed upon problem? What solutions do we have?” Thompson said.

She also has been vocal in her opinion that the parliamentarian is a targeted

attempt to constrict debate.

“I think communication is the most important attribute of an organization,” Thompson said. “If we don’t talk about what needs to be talked about, are we serving the purpose for

which we were elected?”

Nebeker said having order at meetings is what allows commissioners to debate freely.

“I think there maybe is a misunderstanding on what free speech is,” she said.

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