

# Senate confirms Sessions for attorney general

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Wednesday confirmed Sen. Jeff Sessions to be attorney general in the Trump administration despite fierce Democratic opposition to the Alabama Republican over his record on civil rights and immigration.

The 52-47 nearly party-line vote capped weeks of divisive battles over Sessions, an early supporter of President Donald Trump and one of the Senate’s most conservative lawmakers. After the vote was announced, Sessions’ Republican colleagues applauded the outcome while barely a handful of Democrats did the same.

In a post-vote valedictory speech, Sessions alluded to the bitter partisanship and wished for more collegiality. “Denigrating people who disagree with us, I think, is not a healthy trend for our body,” he said.

Since Trump tapped Sessions, Democrats have laced into the lawmaker, casting him as too cozy with Trump and too harsh on immigrants. They asserted he wouldn’t do enough to protect voting rights of minorities, protections for gays and the legal right of women to obtain an abortion. They fear immigrants in the country illegally won’t receive due process with Sessions as the top law enforcement officer.

“His record raises doubts about whether he can be a champion for those who need this office most and it also raises doubts about whether he can curb unlawful overreach” by Trump, said Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va.

Republicans say Sessions has demonstrated over a long career in public service — and two decades in the Senate — that he possesses integrity and honesty and is committed to justice.

“He’s honest. He’s fair. He’s been a friend to many of us, on both sides of the aisle,” Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said. “It’s been tough to watch all this good man has been put through in recent weeks. This is a well-qualified colleague with a deep reverence for the law. He believes strongly in the equal application of it to everyone.”

Sessions won unanimous backing from Senate Republicans but picked up the support of just one Democrat, Joe Manchin of West Virginia.

Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley is expected to name a replacement for sessions as early as Thursday. Bentley has named six finalists for the Senate appointment, including state



AP Photo/Andrew Harnik, File  
**In this Jan. 10 file photo, Attorney General-designate, Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala. testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington at his confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee.**

Attorney General Luther Strange and GOP Rep. Robert Aderholt.

Strange is considered a leading candidate for the job since Bentley interviewed potential replacements for state attorney general, according to people close to the process. However, Bentley’s office has said he has not made a decision.

Wednesday’s vote came amid rising tension between Republicans controlling the chamber over delaying tactics by minority Democratic that have left fewer of Trump’s picks in place than President Barack Obama had eight years ago.

Democrats no longer have filibuster power over Cabinet picks, however, after changing Senate rules when they controlled the chamber in 2013.

Next up for the Senate is Rep. Tom Price, R-Ga., Trump’s pick for health secretary. A final vote on Price could come late Thursday and success seemed certain.

Democrats have solidly opposed Price, a staunch advocate of repealing Obama’s health care overhaul and reshaping and scaling back the Medicare and Medicaid programs that provide health care to older and low-income people.

But they’ve mostly accused Price, a wealthy former orthopedic surgeon, of conflicts of interest by acquiring stocks in health care companies and pushing legislation that could help those firms.

They’ve especially targeted his acquisition of shares in Innate Immunotherapeutics, an Australian biotech firm that’s said Price got a special

insider’s deal. Price, who has said he learned of the opportunity from a fellow lawmaker, Rep. Chris Collins, R-N.Y., had testified to Congress that the shares were available to all investors.

“If I were a prosecutor, I’d say this case has real potential,” Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Wednesday.

This week has featured overnight, round-the-clock Senate sessions as GOP leaders are grinding through a thicket of controversial picks.

Epitomizing the sharp-edged partisanship surrounding confirmation of Trump’s Cabinet nominees, Sen. Elizabeth Warren was given a rare rebuke Tuesday evening for quoting Coretta Scott King, widow of the late civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., in her 1986 criticism of Sessions.

King wrote that as an acting federal prosecutor in Alabama, Sessions used his power to “chill the free exercise of the vote by black citizens.”

McConnell held that the Massachusetts Democrat had run afoul of rules about impugning a fellow senator.

Sessions’ nomination to a federal judgeship was rejected three decades ago by the Senate Judiciary Committee after it was alleged that as a federal prosecutor he had called a black attorney “boy” and had said organizations like the NAACP and the American Civil Liberties Union were un-American.

At his hearing last month, Sessions said he had never harbored racial animus.

# Rancorous Senate ‘silencing’ gives Warren a national boost

WASHINGTON (AP) — The turbulent national debate over race, gender and free speech consumed the normally staid Senate on Wednesday after the GOP majority voted to silence Sen. Elizabeth Warren, abruptly elevating her celebrity status at a moment when liberals are hungry for a leader to take on Donald Trump.

The highly unusual rebuke of the Massachusetts Democrat came as the Senate weighed President Trump’s choice for attorney general, GOP Sen. Jeff Sessions of Alabama, who secured confirmation on a nearly party-line vote Wednesday evening. It also gave frustrated Democrats a rallying cry weeks into a presidency that is dividing the country like few before.

“I certainly hope that this anti-free-speech attitude is not traveling down Pennsylvania Avenue to our great chamber,” Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York warned darkly as Democrats jumped at an opening to link the GOP’s conduct to that of Trump himself. “This is not what America is about — silencing speech, especially in this chamber.”

Republicans argued they were just trying to enforce necessary rules of decorum in a Senate that is a last bulwark of civil debate in an angry nation.

“I hope that maybe we’ve all been chastened a little bit,” chided the No. 2 Senate Republican, John Cornyn of Texas. “We’re at a pretty challenging time in our nation’s history when many people who were surprised and disappointed at the last election are unwilling to accept the results. ... I only hope that after the passage of some time they will return to their senses.”

But the debate immediately took on overtones of race and gender. Warren was rebuked as she was reading a letter by Martin Luther King Jr.’s widow, Coretta Scott King, opposing Sessions’ ultimately unsuccessful nomination to a federal judgeship in 1986. Subsequently several male Democratic senators stood up

and read from the same letter but without drawing objections, leading Democratic activists to proclaim that Senate Republicans were interested only in silencing a woman.

The moment inspired a Twitter hashtag, #LetLizSpeak, and clips from C-SPAN2 went viral. “By silencing Elizabeth Warren, the GOP gave women around the world a rallying cry,” fellow Democratic Sen. Kamala Harris of California said over Twitter.

Warren was chastised under a little-used Senate regulation, Rule 19, which bars any senator from impugning the motives of any other or imputing “any conduct or motive unworthy or unbecoming of a senator.” The Senate historian’s office could not immediately say when the rule was last invoked, but Democrats accused Republicans of selectively enforcing it. They noted the GOP did not apply it when, for example, Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas accused Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of lying in relation to a dispute over the Export-Import Bank two years ago.

This time, Warren drew a warning from the presiding officer as she quoted Tuesday evening from a letter written by the late Sen. Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts that referred to Sessions as “a disgrace.” She continued with her speech, and began quoting from Coretta Scott King’s letter and an accompanying statement that accused Sessions, a federal prosecutor at the time, of using the power of his office to “chill the free exercise of the vote by black citizens.”

Democrats are portraying Sessions as a threat to civil rights, voting rights and immigration; Republicans have defended Trump’s choice to be the top law enforcement officer as a man of integrity who will be an independent voice in the new administration.

McConnell stood and invoked Rule 19, saying that Warren has “impugned the motives and conduct of our colleague from Alabama” in quoting the words from Mrs. King.



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