

Former Montana Rep. Zinke takes helm of Interior Department

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Montana Rep. Ryan Zinke was sworn in Wednesday as secretary of the Interior Department, assuming oversight of 400 million acres of public land, mostly in the West.

Vice President Mike Pence administered the oath of office hours after the Senate confirmed President Donald Trump's nomination of Zinke by a vote of 68-31. Several Democrats from Western states as well as those facing tough re-election campaigns next year, including Montana's Jon Tester, Indiana's Joe Donnelly and Joe Manchin of West Virginia, voted for Zinke, a Republican.

Zinke pledged to "get to work" immediately and said he knows he'll "be held accountable to get things done."

A former Navy SEAL, Zinke praised his new boss

as a "great president and a commander in chief I will fight with."

Zinke is the 16th of 22 of Trump's Cabinet and Cabinet-level nominations to win Senate approval. Ben Carson, Trump's choice to lead the Department of Housing and Urban Development, cleared a Senate hurdle by a vote of 62-37. Carson's confirmation was expected later this week.

Zinke, 55, and a former Montana state senator, resigned as a delegate to the Republican National Convention last year to protest the GOP's position in favor of land transfers to state or private groups.

Still, his stance on public lands has come into question in recent weeks after he voted in favor of a House rule that would allow federal land transfers to be considered cost-free and budget-neutral, making it easier for drilling and development.



AP Photo/Andrew Harnik

Vice President Mike Pence administers the oath of office to Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke Wednesday as his wife Lolita holds the Bible.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Zinke at Interior should "concern every lover of our great and grand national parks."

Dismissing the Republican's claim to be like the late President Teddy Roosevelt, Schumer said, "You can't be

a Roosevelt conservationist if you sell off public lands."

Countering the Democrat, Montana Republican Sen. Steve Daines said Zinke "will be a strong advocate for our public lands."

Zinke, who recently began his second term as Montana's sole House

member, told senators at a January hearing that federal land management should be done under a multiple-use model that allows hiking, hunting, fishing and camping along with harvesting timber, mining for coal and drilling for oil and natural gas.

Zinke also pledged to tackle an estimated \$12 billion backlog in maintenance and repair at national parks and stand firm against attempts to sell, give away or transfer federal lands.

Sen. Maria Cantwell of Washington state, the top Democrat on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, said she is not convinced that Zinke will be able to "stand up" to Trump and prevent oil, gas and mining companies from unduly exploiting public lands.

Cantwell also said Zinke appears willing to support transfer of some federal

lands to states, citing his vote for the GOP-sponsored rules package. She worries that Zinke may weaken or repeal recent designations by President Barack Obama of national monuments, including Utah's Bears Ears monument.

Senate Energy Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski of Alaska called Zinke an excellent choice, noting that the fifth-generation Montanan is an avid hunter, fisherman and skier.

"He was born in the West. He lives in the West. He understands it, he understands its people," Murkowski said.

Zinke also has "firsthand experience in trying to solve" problems faced by the Interior Department and has "shown he understands the need for the department to be a partner of Alaska and our Western states," Murkowski said.

Trump's immigration mixed message draws some skepticism

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump surprised congressional leaders when he suddenly suggested he was open to broad immigration reform. But while there is appetite on Capitol Hill for legislation, there is also skepticism, and the president's hard-line rhetoric over the past two years could make a compromise bill much harder.

Trump signaled a potential shift on Tuesday in a private meeting with news anchors. He told them he was open to legislation that would give legal status to some people living in the U.S. illegally and provide a pathway to citizenship to those brought to the U.S. illegally as children.

Those private comments raised expectations that he might make a similar call in his prime-time address. Instead, Trump pledged to vigorously target people living in the U.S. illegally who "threaten our communities" and prey on "innocent citizens," words similar to his campaign speeches.

The mixed messaging underscored the uncertainty about the president's intentions, and drew a mixed reaction on Capitol Hill. While some in his party could welcome a new push for comprehensive immigration reform, it's far from clear exactly what that might entail. Trump spent his campaign whipping his supporters into a frenzy on the issue, painting a picture of a nation overrun by violent people living here illegally, committing crimes and stealing American jobs.

That's left many Democrats skeptical and Republicans on both sides of the issue appearing to hear what they want.

"I hope that it opens the door for comprehensive immigration reform, which we obviously feel is vital," said Republican Sen. John McCain of Arizona, who was a member of the so-called Gang of Eight that spearheaded a 2013 immigration bill that ultimately failed after passing the Senate.

Sen. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., another Gang of Eight member, said he was encouraged by Trump's remarks — less in the speech than what came out earlier. He said the time was ripe for action, despite Trump's past rhetoric denouncing "illegal amnesty."

"Only Nixon could go to China, I think there are parallels there," said Flake. That was a reference to President Richard Nixon's 1972 meeting with Mao Zedong, now a political metaphor for a leader taking an action that his supporters would typically condemn if taken by someone from another party.

Flake suggested that Trump could "come out and say, 'All right, we've got to solve this. We're not going to deport 11 million people. There are people out there afraid. ... Why don't we get something we can agree on?' Now's the time."

But GOP Rep. Ken Buck, R-Colo., heard something else. He says Trump "was very clear that he wants to secure the border, he wants to make sure that we are deporting criminal aliens and he gave some very vivid examples of the dangers of having people in this country who should be removed, have been removed and have come back."

White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer said Wednesday that any legislation would have to be on Trump's terms.

"He recognizes that a solution, a comprehensive solution, has eluded our nation for a long time. And it's a big problem. And if he can get it consistent with his principles he will," Spicer said.

Trump campaigned as an immigration hard-liner, vowing to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border and step up deportations. Since taking office, he has hewed closely to those promises, signing an order aimed at suspending the U.S. refugee program and subjecting all immigrants in the country illegally to possible deportation if they are charged or convicted of any offense, or even suspected of a crime.

Trump did say during the campaign that he was open to "softening" his position — and some who met with him privately were convinced at times that he was going to move in that direction. But he ultimately landed where he started, declaring in September that under his presidency there would be "no legal status or becoming a citizen of the United States by illegally entering our country."

"People will know that you can't just smuggle in, hunker down and wait to be legalized," he said then. "Those days are over."

Trump's vacillations are nothing new. During the campaign, he routinely said that while the "bad guys" would have to go, he would eventually find a mechanism to let the "good" immigrants stay. In a high-profile campaign immigration speech Trump kicked the can down the road, saying that once the borders were secure and a new immigration system in place, he would "be in a position to consider the appropriate disposition of those who remain."

Roy Beck, the president and CEO of NumbersUSA, a non-profit that advocates for reduced immigration, said that while Trump's comments appear contradictory, comprehensive immigration reform doesn't necessarily mean to Trump what it has meant in the past. Still, he said, Trump is walking a fine line on an issue that helped drive him to the White House.

"He cannot lose the moral high ground that he has on that issue. So he's got to be very careful," Beck said. "But that's not to say there's not room for some maneuvering and flexibility."

Thursday Morning

Table with columns for STATION, AM (6, 6:30, 7, 7:30, 8, 8:30), and PM (9, 9:30, 10, 10:30, 11, 11:30) programming for FOX, CBS, NBC, and PBS stations.

AFTERNOON

Table with columns for STATION, PM (12, 12:30, 1, 1:30, 2, 2:30, 3, 3:30, 4, 4:30, 5, 5:30) programming for FOX, CBS, NBC, and PBS stations.

EVENING

Large table with columns for STATION, PM (6, 6:30, 7, 7:30, 8, 8:30, 9, 9:30, 10, 10:30, 11, 11:30) and CABLE channels (A&E, AMC, ANPL, CMT, CNBC, CNN, DISC, DISN, ESPN, ESPN2, FX, GOLDF, GSN, HALL, HGVTV, HIST, LIFE, NICK, ROOT, SPIKE, SYFY, TBS, TCM, TLC, TNT, UNI, USA, WE, WGN, STZ ENC, HBO, HBO2, HBO3, MAX, SHOW, STARZ) programming.

NIGHT OWL

Table with columns for STATION, AM (12, 12:30, 1, 1:30, 2, 2:30, 3, 3:30, 4, 4:30, 5, 5:30) programming for FOX, CBS, NBC, and PBS stations.