

Bernhardt confirmed as Secretary of the Interior

April 11, 2019

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee approved acting Interior Department Secretary David Bernhardt's nomination for the permanent secretary position by a 14-6 vote on April 4. Bernhardt received bipartisan support from the committee, with three of the 14 votes in favor of his confirmation coming from Senators Joe Manchin (D-WV), Martin Heinrich (D-NM) and Angus King (I-ME).

Bernhardt has served as acting secretary since the resignation of former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke in late 2018, and was nominated to officially replace Zinke on February 4. His long history with the Interior Department has led many committee members to express strong support for his candidacy. During a hearing preceding the vote, Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) said, "he's got great familiarity with the issues that will come before him, and he's proven he can ably lead the department," with Manchin adding, "he's clearly qualified and has the experience to serve as secretary."

Acting Secretary Bernhardt is currently facing ethics allegations due to questions about his relationship with Westland Water District, a former client from his career as a natural resources lobbyist. An invoice obtained by the New York Times labeled "Federal Lobbying" suggests that Bernhardt may have still been working with Westland Water District after filing a legal notice that stated he was no longer a lobbyist. Bernhardt has repeatedly denied these claims, submitting a written statement saying, "I have not engaged in regulated lobbying on behalf of Westlands Water District after November 18th, 2016." Bernhardt's industry connections were mentioned during his confirmation hearing on March 28 but were quickly dismissed.

Bernhardt was confirmed as Secretary of the Interior by the full Senate on April 11 by a vote of 56-41.

Sources: E&E News; The Hill; The New York Times; The Washington Post; U.S. Senate, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Lisa Murkowski.
