Trump nominates opponent of environmental regulation for secretary of the interior

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On Tuesday, President-elect Donald Trump announced the nomination of House Republican Representative Ryan Zinke for the position of secretary of the interior. In Zinke, Trump has nominated another right-wing figure who combines fanatical opposition to government regulations with an embrace of US militarism.

The secretary of the interior oversees the management of key departments pertaining to energy and the environment. Zinke, a first term congressman from Montana, has built a career out of supporting anti-environment legislation. One of the determining factors in Trump's nomination of Zinke is his support for economic nationalism and US "energy independence," involving the increased exploitation of natural resources found on US soil.

Zinke built up a record of support for environmental deregulation as a member of the Congressional Natural Resource Committee. While the Montana congressman has supported public ownership of land and forests, largely due to his closeness to hunting and fishing interest groups in his home state, he has repeatedly advocated pro-business deregulation for companies operating on federal land.

In addition to supporting the removal of regulations on mining, oil and timber companies, Zinke has voted for transferring control of forested land to "advisory groups" appointed at the state level. Representatives of the timber and mining industries would man such groups, allowing lawmakers to skirt federal regulations such as the National Environmental Protection Act while giving representatives of big business free license to divide up and exploit resources.

Elsewhere, Zinke has voted to cut the budget of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and opposed its regulatory policies. When asked in 2014 about his position on global warming, Zinke told the Montana-based *Billings Gazette* that, while climate change was "not a hoax," it was "not proven science either."

Zinke has earned a rating of three percent from the League of Conservation Voters, based on numerous bills he supported or sponsored. In response to Zinke's nomination, environmentalist group Friends of the Earth released a statement declaring, "If the task is plundering our public lands on behalf of fossil fuel empires, Rep. Ryan Zinke is the man for the job."

Zinke used his nearly 23 years as a US Navy Seal to further his political career. After serving a stint as commander of the SEAL Team Six in the Persian Gulf, Bosnia and Kosovo, Zinke transitioned to politics. He exploited his military background to get elected to the Montana state legislature and then to the US House of Representatives.

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, during his 2014 congressional run Zinke bragged that, while his Democratic opponent played the guitar, he chose to "waterboard people" for fun.

Elsewhere, Zinke played to right-wing fanaticism by referring to Democrat Hillary Clinton as "the real enemy" and the "antichrist." As a House Republican, Zinke has voted to defund Planned Parenthood and extend federal funding for US wars abroad, and has supported deploying US on the ground in Syria.

Along with the heads of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Energy and the State Department, Zinke's nomination completes the selection of figures tasked with implementing Trump's policy on the environment. It continues Trump's policy of filling his Cabinet with arch-reactionaries who have deep conflicts of interest with the stated missions and policies of the agencies they are set to oversee.

Further exposing the character of the incoming

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administration, an article in the *Wall Street Journal* noted that numerous cabinet selections are expecting massive payouts by taking advantage "of a longstanding federal policy designed to let incoming appointees sell their shares and other assets, to avoid conflicts of interest in their new jobs, without racking up huge tax bills."

The *Journal* mentions that Exxon CEO Rex Tillerson, whom Trump has selected to be his secretary of state, may be given additional sums of unvested stock totaling nearly $175 million before he departs for his new government post in January. "Awarding the shares now would allow Mr. Tillerson to fully divest his Exxon holdings," the *Journal* says, while noting, "It could open the company up to criticism that it is giving Mr. Tillerson a gift as he heads to a cabinet post in which he could have vast influence over Exxon's fortunes."

Such a payout, the *Journal* states, is "one example of the awkwardness created by Mr. Trump's decision to tap so many sitting corporate executives for his cabinet." Trump himself has numerous investments and business relationships which will be directly affected by his actions as president.

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