

CONFIRMING SUSAN COMBS AS AN ASSISTANT INTERIOR SECRETARY

Passed: 57-36

SUMMARY:

The Senate confirmed Susan Combs, the former Texas state comptroller and outspoken critic of the Endangered Species Act, to be the Interior Department's assistant secretary for policy, management and budget. (*June 5, 2019, Roll Call No. 141*)

BACKGROUND:

Susan Combs is an active opponent and outspoken critic of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and has a clear track record of bias towards industry over wildlife conservation. In 2011, as Texas State Comptroller, Ms. Combs engineered moving the state's endangered species program from the Department of Parks and Wildlife to her office, which manages state fiscal and tax matters and does not staff a single biologist or scientist. She used her authority to oppose the listing of species under the ESA, once referring to new listings as "incoming Scud missiles" that impeded the state's business development. Ms. Combs, who has reportedly pocketed up to \$2.1 million from oil companies, opposed the listing of the dunes sagebrush lizard, which is severely threatened by oil and gas development, and helped to fund a petition to delist Central Texas' most famous endangered species, the golden-cheeked warbler, whose protected status prohibits development on valuable oil and gas fields.

Ms. Combs also has a history of restricting scientific research that goes back decades. As Comptroller, she used her budget to finance studies on species that some academics have criticized as politically skewed. When contracting with scientists for new research on species proposed for listing, an investigation found that her office included an unusually restrictive clause that would retain veto power over publication of any research produced. As a state representative in the 1990s, Ms. Combs passed a law designed to restrict the state from sharing data with the FWS that might have been used to designate species as threatened or endangered.

OUTCOME:

On June 5, 2019, the Senate confirmed the nomination of Susan Combs, 57-36. "No" was the pro-conservation vote.