



Profile of Secretary of State-designate Rex W. Tillerson

By Roxanne Perugino

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President-elect Donald Trump named Rex Tillerson, Exxon-Mobil CEO, as his choice for secretary of state on December 13. The appointment is controversial and has been met with both support and skepticism from the foreign policy establishment in Washington, DC, and among Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill. Tillerson's official bio can be found [here](#).

Many have praised the selection of Tillerson. Former Defense Secretary Bob Gates and former Secretaries of State Condoleezza Rice and Jim Baker voiced their support for Tillerson's nomination. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky) also has expressed strong support for Tillerson.

Critics, on the other hand, view Tillerson as an odd choice for the country's top diplomat. He has never held a diplomatic job nor a government position. He has no substantive foreign policy experience. While he has led negotiations involving oil deals in Yemen, Russia, Iraq, and Qatar, for example, critics say making oil deals and formulating foreign policy are two very different issues. His business dealings with Russia and close ties to President Vladimir Putin are particularly worrisome to several senators, who could potentially prevent Tillerson's confirmation.

As a result, Tillerson will face intense scrutiny and questioning when his confirmation hearings begin before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC). SFRC Chairman Bob Corker (R-Tennessee), who was in the running for the job and who will oversee the confirmation hearings, congratulated Tillerson on his nomination but has not pledged to support his confirmation. Tillerson also will face tough questions from Russia hawks—Senators Marco Rubio (R-Florida) and Jeanne Shaheen (D-New Hampshire). SFRC Republicans John Barrasso (R-Wyoming) and Ron Johnson (R-Wisconsin) also have expressed concern about Tillerson. In addition, Senators John McCain (R-Arizona) and Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) have indicated that they are uneasy about Tillerson's dealings with Russia and Putin. SFRC ranking member Senator Ben Cardin (D-Maryland) said he is “deeply troubled” by Tillerson's opposition to US sanctions on Russia, imposed following Russia's invasion of Crimea.

Not only will Tillerson's relationship with Putin be examined but also intelligence reports of Russia's involvement in the presidential election. Trump and his transition team have dismissed the intelligence community's findings, but senators view these findings as troubling. Senator Chris

Murphy (D-Connecticut) admonished Republican hawks on Russia, saying that they would never be taken seriously if they vote to confirm Tillerson.

Cardin and environmental groups also are concerned over Exxon Mobil's position on climate change and the environment. Who can forget the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska in 1989, which poured 42 million liters of crude oil and contaminated over 1,200 miles of shoreline and killed tens of thousands of marine wildlife?

Congressional sources report that Democrats will present a united front against Tillerson to deny his confirmation. Tillerson will need 51 votes to approve his nomination. The makeup in the 115th Congress will be 52 Republicans and 48 Democrats; therefore, Tillerson could be confirmed if all 52 Republicans vote for his confirmation. If even two Republicans peel off, Tillerson will still need some Democratic support. There is no guarantee that Democrats will act in unison, as ten of 25 Democratic senators will be up for reelection in 2018 in states that Trump carried.

Despite the controversy surrounding Tillerson's nomination, the current opinion favors his confirmation. While the confirmation process is likely to be contentious, senators may not be willing to deny a new president his cabinet choices. Tillerson probably will be confirmed by a very narrow vote.