

“Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.”)

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now I want to address two more issues related to this topic.

First, are the reports that the President is planning to create a panel of cherry-picked scientists who question the severity of climate change to “counter” the scientific consensus. I mentioned these reports earlier this week, but I want to update my friends in this Chamber that Democrats are in the process of preparing legislation that would defund this fake climate panel. We hope this legislation, like our resolution, will eventually be bipartisan because it shouldn’t be partisan to oppose a group of handpicked climate deniers spreading the fossil fuel industry’s propaganda under the imprimatur of the White House. It shouldn’t be partisan to oppose the administration’s setting up its own Orwellian Ministry of Truth on climate change.

So I urge my friends on the other side of the aisle who believe in climate science to sign on to our legislation once we have it ready.

NOMINATION OF ANDREW WHEELER

Mr. President, second is the nomination of Andrew Wheeler to be the next Administrator of the EPA—a question currently before the Senate. I opposed Mr. Wheeler’s nomination to be the Deputy Administrator, and I will oppose his nomination to be Administrator as well.

I opposed Mr. Wheeler initially because I thought his career as a lobbyist working on behalf of big polluters and climate deniers was exactly the wrong kind of experience for a job at the EPA, the Environmental Protection Agency. He spent most of his career lobbying against the same environmental protections he now oversees, and his time at the EPA has done little to assuage my original concerns.

Mr. Wheeler has failed to take meaningful action on toxic chemicals, including the chemical PFAS, which has plagued my home State. He has downplayed the severity of climate change and undermined several EPA programs that seek to address it, including the regulation of poisonous mercury from powerplants, efforts to reduce carbon emissions from cars and trucks, as well as replacing the Clean Power Plan.

At a time when climate change is the No. 1 threat facing our planet, installing a man such as Mr. Wheeler as permanent Administrator of the EPA—the Environmental Protection Agency—is the wrong thing to do.

So as I said earlier this morning, Leader McCONNELL’s move to bring the Green New Deal forward is nothing more than a stunt, but one of the great and positive ironies is that, finally, folks are talking about climate change again, more than at any time I can think of under this Republican majority.

If and when Leader McCONNELL brings his version of the Green New Deal forward for a vote, we will demand that Republicans first answer the core questions on climate change.

Again, three simple things: Do you believe climate change is real and happening? Do you believe human activity contributes to it? Do you believe Congress must act to address this pressing challenge?

If Leader McCONNELL and my Republican friends can’t answer those three questions—run away from them—the American people will see right through the ploy. The American people will see that Leader McCONNELL and his party stand against science and against facts, ostriches with their heads buried in the sand as the tide swiftly comes in.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island is recognized.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, our Democratic leader has set three plain and very obvious questions about fossil fuel-burning carbon emissions and climate change that should be easily answered by every single Member of the Senate, and the fact that this is a problem is a clear indication of fossil fuel influence in this body—the regrettable extent of fossil fuel influence in this body.

It was not always this way. Here is a letter that a number of us came to the floor to talk about yesterday. The letter was written December 23, 1986. There had been hearings on climate change in the Environment and Public Works Committee, and a bipartisan group of Senators wanted some answers. They wrote this letter to what then existed, an Office of Technology Assessment for the Congress, inquiring about how serious they felt this was and what could be done about it, signed by Senator Stafford, Senator Chafee, Senator Durenberger, and three Democrats in 1986. I do not believe that a Republican Senator could be found to sign this letter today.

I got here in 2007, and for that year, and in 2008 and 2009, we had multiple bipartisan climate bills being discussed in this body. Over and over again, there were a Democrat and Republican who got together and worked to try to solve the climate problem—more than a decade ago. We have seen bipartisanship on this issue.

We have even seen, in 2009, this New York Times full-page advertisement signed by Donald J. Trump, which said that the science of climate change is “scientifically irrefutable.” Those were his words, not mine, in 2009, which said that if we don’t act there would be “catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and our planet”—his words, not mine. That was 1986, that was 2007, and this was 2009.

Then something happened. Citizens United got decided by the Supreme Court or, to be fair to the Supreme Court, Citizens United got decided by five Republican appointees on the Supreme Court.

In my view, the fossil fuel industry asked for that decision, predicted that decision, and they were off like a sprinter at the gun when they got that decision. From that moment, all of that bipartisan activity on climate change here in the Senate ended, and it ended because the fossil fuel industry was allowed to spend unlimited money in politics. They found out how to spend unlimited dark money in politics. It is politically obvious that if one can spend unlimited money in politics, one can also threaten to spend unlimited money in politics. So between the unlimited spending and the unlimited, anonymous dark money spending and whatever they did in the way of threats and promises, it has been like a heart attack—flatlined—here in the Senate, since that moment. It is a tragedy.

In fact, if you go back to this letter for a minute, there were six signatories. We couldn’t get six States to come to the floor yesterday because one of these States has two Republican Senators, and we couldn’t get either of them to come to the floor.

I don’t know what has happened to the Republican Party that they can’t take this seriously even now—even as States like Florida are flooding on sunny days, even as States see wildfires they have never seen before, even as farmers are recording drought and flood conditions that are unprecedented, even as my State looks forward to 5 or 6 feet of sea level rise.

And then we got a clue as to what goes on here. This is a letter that was written on behalf of Andrew Wheeler, who is the slightly cleaned-up version of Scott Pruitt and who is pending before us to lead the Environmental Protection Agency. It ought to tell us a lot that the Republicans put up a coal lobbyist to represent the people of America leading the Environmental Protection Agency.

What tells you a lot also is this letter of support for this guy. Who is on it? These are these phony-baloney front group organizations funded by the fossil fuel industry that got together to write this letter:

The Heartland Institute. Koch-affiliated groups gave it \$7.18 million, and \$730,000 came from Exxon. Heartland is such a slippery, slimy group that they compared climate scientists to the Unabomber. That is the company that they travel in.

The Cornwall Alliance. Secret funding—we don’t know, but they are always in this climate-denier fringe crowd. The founder doesn’t believe in evolution. He said that tornadoes are a punishment from God, and that AIDS is punishment for being gay. You are running in great company with them, guys.

FreedomWorks is next. They received \$2.5 million from Koch-affiliated groups, and at least \$130,000 from the American Petroleum Institute.

The Competitive Enterprise Institute is next, with at least \$2 million given from Exxon, and Koch-affiliated groups gave at least \$5.2 million.