

One of my proudest moments with Mayor Karos was when we successfully secured the funds for infrastructure improvement, such as the Big Spring water plan and the Raleigh Street expansion project. George also helped create The Martinsburg Initiative most recently, which is a program I have spoken about before many times on the Senate floor.

This initiative is spearheaded by the Martinsburg Police Department, the Berkeley County Schools, and Shepherd University, as well as a wide array of local partners, such as the Boys and Girls Club of the Eastern Panhandle.

The goal of the program is to stem the horrible opioid addiction problem by identifying and trying to eliminate the basic causes of drug abuse in at-risk families. The mayor has been dedicated to this. The program is extremely successful and has made a tremendous impact in the Martinsburg community.

It is also a perfect example of how a community can come together at different levels and work together to create a lasting and impactful solution to a big, big problem.

Through the actions taken under Mayor Karos's administration, countless children in the Martinsburg area have now seen that there is a life away from illicit drugs and opioid addiction.

George exemplified hard work, dedication, and loyalty. He still does. This is evident in the length of time he served his community and also through the results that came from his vision and his collaboration with so many others in Martinsburg.

The rest of the State agreed with this because George was named "Mayor of the Year" and "Public Official of the Year." This came as no surprise to me and many, many others.

George's favorite motto is "Plan your work and work your plan." That is what the mayor did. His second motto was something I think we could probably use around here: "A closed mouth catches no flies." These were the words George followed every day when he was working as mayor. They helped to keep progress moving, and they perfectly describe how George conducted himself each and every day, which is why he was reelected many times but also so beloved in his community.

After 46 years of devoted service to his city and the community, Mayor Karos is retiring. While I am sad that this chapter is coming to a close, I am grateful for the opportunity to work together with him to better the city of Martinsburg. His leadership, successes, and his life mottos will serve as an example to follow.

I really thank Mayor Karos for being a good friend and for letting me get to know him. I really thank him for his service and wish him the very best in his retirement.

I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I had the chance to at least hear the end of Senator CAPITO's speech. I thank her for the work she has done on the opioid issue that she was talking about. It is one of the very productive areas of bipartisanship going all the way back to CARA with Senator PORTMAN and myself. I know West Virginia, like Rhode Island, had a terrible situation. I appreciate very much her comments.

#### CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I am here today for a different topic. I am here for the 269th time with my increasingly battered "Time to Wake Up" poster to try to alert this Chamber to the threat of climate change—something, obviously, Louisiana knows very well—and to the forces that are blocking action on climate.

In these climate speeches, I have talked often about the insidious encroachment on American Government of special interest power, which is what is behind all this climate denial and obstruction.

It didn't happen on its own. The fossil fuel industry's political forces used the cover of anonymous funding—what we call dark money—and they used phony front groups and clever propaganda to accomplish their aims.

In effect, these fossil fuel political forces have run a covert operation against our own government. We observe the disturbances; we hear the rustling in the leaves; we see strange sites, but many of us haven't connected the dots. Those who are familiar with some of the elements may not put the whole story together. Some are so accustomed to this sinister behavior that they think it is normal. Some folks are like a city dweller in the jungle, needing a field biologist to identify the behaviors going on around them.

Let me give you this field biologist's overview. We understand pretty well the crew of bad actors lurking behind climate denial. Democrats in the Senate have repeatedly called out and reported on this web of denial funded by the fossil fuel industry. Investigative journalists like Jane Mayer and scholars like Naomi Oreskes have dug into this scheme. There is actually a robust academic subspecialty that analyzes this web of denial as a novel socioeconomic and political phenomenon.

The covert special interest machinery behind that effort is not just dedicated to opposing climate legislation. Another covert operation it runs is chronicled in our recent Senate Democrats' report here that examines the bad actors behind the special interest Court capture operation. This operation has crept forward over years, even decades. The Republican Party is more the tool of this effort than its principal. Big donors are behind it. The goal here is to fashion for the donors a Supreme Court that will not just rule for but reset society's ground rules to favor the big donors behind the scheme.

On yet another front, there has been recent public reporting revealing the bad actors rushing to stand up a new and improved Republican voter suppression apparatus as they start to panic about the November election.

Earlier this year, longtime partisan court fixer Leonard Leo stepped down from his formal role as executive vice president of the Court capture command center at the Federalist Society. At the same time, a mysterious new project called the Honest Elections Project began voter suppression work in swing States like Florida, Nevada, Wisconsin, and Michigan. It ran ads accusing Democrats of cheating with mail-in ballots; it sent threatening letters to election officials challenging voter rolls; and it filed legal proceedings—lots of legal proceedings—arguing for more voting restrictions ahead of November.

But in their hurry, they did a weak job of covering their tracks. Reporters quickly uncovered that the Honest Elections Project is a rebrand of the Judicial Education Project—a key cog in that same Leonard Leo's machine.

As the Guardian reporters who broke the story observed, "By having a hand in both voting litigation and the judges on the Federal bench, [Leo's] network could create a system where conservative donors have an avenue to both oppose voting rights and appoint judges who would back at that effort."

Last, we pretty well know who funds the massive and often anonymous political operation that props up the Republican Party. Take 2016, for instance, when the fossil fuel billionaire Koch brothers' political operation spent \$2 million on ads targeting viable Democratic candidates in just two Senate races—Ohio and Wisconsin.

Over a year before the election, they were already at work bombing those candidates. They didn't use their names. They hid behind phony front groups. It took years to dig this out, but that is what happened.

The anonymously funded U.S. Chamber of Commerce spent nearly \$40 million in 2016 and 2018 supporting Republican House and Senate candidates.

Dark waves of untraceable dark money pour everywhere into Republican elections. From slips and leaks and investigative reporting, we can see enough overlap across these four efforts to state the general proposition: It is the same crew.

If you look at it as a covert operation run by special interests against their own country, it has at least these four programs, but it has one set of interests behind it: They run the climate denial covert op. They run the Court capture covert op. They rushed out the voter suppression op. And, with their money, they captured the Republican Party to use as their front.

If this operation were not covert, if it were obvious, if the press and the public could readily connect the dots, it wouldn't work. People would know it was fossil fuel polluter money. They

would get the joke. That is why it has to be a covert operation, and that means it needs dark money—anonymous, untraceable funds.

A virulent little galaxy of 501(c)(4) groups, shell corporations, donor trusts, and other screening tools has been crafted to anonymize the donors and hide the connections. Why? Because the blood pumping through this beast that gives it life is dark money. If we expose that secret blood flow, the whole beast shrivels up: no dark money, no covert operations.

That is why efforts to expose the dark money donors provoke such hysterical reactions from the front groups and from their operatives and from their mouthpieces like the Wall Street Journal editorial page.

I have experienced these hysterical reactions over and over. Indeed, there was one in the news today. This speech might provoke even another.

But at the end of the day, as Americans, I believe we share the proposition that nothing could be more corrupting than large flows of anonymous money in politics. That sort of money doesn't even have to be spent to be corrupting. The mere threat of a political attack can do the job, and the donor saves the money. Or it could be a private promise of unlimited support.

Once a political weapon is permissible, private threats and promises to use or withhold that weapon are inevitable, and they are inevitably corrupting.

But don't think the prospect of corruption daunts the schemers. A political regime that allows their corruption and helps cover up their covert operations is precisely what the dark money donors want.

Why else would we do nothing about climate change when it is so obvious? Why else would we ignore every respectable scientist in the field? Why else ignore warnings of financial meltdown looming from bankers and economists across the country, even across the world? Why else ignore the fires that are burning up Siberia, for Pete's sake, and, closer to home, the flood warnings along our coasts and the droughts and the floods and the storms across our States?

When astronomers see celestial bodies behave inexplicably, they look for the dark star, the black hole that influences the behavior of the visible bodies. Dark money is the dark star, the evil star influencing Congress's behavior—or I should say misbehavior—on climate change.

So a preview of coming attractions here: The dark-money-funded race to capture the Court is also a race by the schemers to establish a new constitutional doctrine protecting their dark money schemes. Such a doctrine is already being grown in the dark-money-funded ideological hothouses, a theory that dark money anonymity is protected by the First Amendment rights of association and petition—a theory giving powerful interests the constitu-

tional right to run covert operations against their own government, leaving regular citizens beguiled or bewildered.

That theory may seem ludicrous, and, indeed, this notion got only the one vote from Justice Thomas in *Citizens United*, but remember that Thomas is the dark money crowd's leading indicator on the Court.

Don't scoff. This argument is now popping up all over the corporate right-wing. Twice so far I have had corporate entities from whom I requested information about their dark money dealings "plead the First" in response to my questions.

The game is on, whether we realize it or not, and one of the stakes in the game is climate action. We cannot be idle about this. Groups that run covert operations against our own country are not to be trusted with that country's welfare.

What a foul convergence it would be if the dark money schemers used dark money to fund a Court capture operation that delivered a Court-created doctrine hatched in dark money hot-houses, protecting that dark money from disclosure for eternity, permanently etching into our Constitution this pathway of corruption.

As I have said over and over, take away the corrupting dark money weaponry from the fossil fuel industry, and we solve climate change. We have lost a decade to *Citizens United*, the decision that gave this industry the weaponry to kill climate bipartisanship. It is a decade we and our children will rue having lost.

Let's lose no more time. Let's, once and for all, root out the corrupting dark money machinery, expose its nefarious and crooked covert operations, shut it down, and start running a real democracy around here again.

If we can't do this now, then let's pray for an election that lets us do it soon.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

#### THE GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I am here on the floor today to talk about some positive news and some positive news that happened just today. It is not about the coronavirus. It is not about politics. It is not about Hurricane Isaias.

It has to do with some urgent and historic help for our national parks, something that is really important to all of us. We all love our parks.

Today President Trump signed into law the landmark Great American Outdoors Act, landmark, bipartisan legislation that will protect and conserve our public lands. I am happy to see this effort finally cross the finish line because the natural beauty and rich history of America is something that we must preserve for future generations.

A big part of the new law is bipartisan legislation that is called the Re-

store Our Parks Act that I have worked on for more than 3 years with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle. Senator MARK WARNER from Virginia was my partner in this, as well as Senator LAMAR ALEXANDER of Tennessee and Senator ANGUS KING of Maine. Our legislation involves urgent stewardship of our national parks, which is something that I have spent more than a dozen years working on. I guess I shouldn't admit that. Sometimes things take a long time around here. But going back to my days as Director of the Office of Management and Budget under President George W. Bush, I started focusing on this issue of the backlog of maintenance projects at our national parks.

It is alarming. It has been growing. It now adds up to over \$12 billion, far more than the parks could ever afford to take care of based on the annual budgets we provide them from Congress. By the way, the annual budget from Congress for all operations and all maintenance is less than \$3 billion. Yet there is a \$12 billion maintenance backlog.

When Teddy Roosevelt started the national parks, he wanted to preserve some of the most beautiful, pristine lands in America. He wanted to be sure they were going to be there for public use. It was a good decision. We now have 84 million acres of parkland all around the country. Some are those beautiful, pristine places like Yosemite and Yellowstone and the Tetons with spectacular, beautiful vistas, but others preserve our history.

We have historical parks around the country. We have battlefields that we have preserved around the country to tell the story of our country, good and bad. We have Presidents' homes that have been preserved to be able to help, again, tell the story of America.

Recently, I was at one of our national park sites in Ohio, and it is the home of an individual who was the first Black colonel in the United States Army. He was also the first Black superintendent of a national park. The home is also a site on the Underground Railroad, so it is a place where people can go and see where escaping slaves were harbored and understand more of the history, not just of slavery but also of the cooperation and the seeking for freedom that came out of the Underground Railroad. This is the Charles Young home near Xenia, OH.

So our national parks are really important for so many reasons. Yet, during the past couple of decades, we haven't taken care of them as we should, and this backlog has built up.

People appreciate our parks. During the past decade or so, we have had an increase of about 58 million in the number of visitors to our national parks. More are coming every year. Why? It is a relatively inexpensive vacation. They are beautiful. People from all over the world know about our national parks, and it is one of the things they love about America.

The problem is that, when these people visit the parks nowadays, they are