

Washington, DC, bureaucrats to be ignorant of—and often very indifferent to—the interests of the people who live in the various communities who are affected by the rules they make and the rules they also enforce.

This isn't a knock on the individual men and women who work within the Federal bureaucracy, most of whom are well-educated, well-intentioned, and highly specialized. But there is no doubt that a regulator in Washington, DC, knows a whole lot less about a melon farm in Emery County, UT, and cares a lot less about the fate of the people who work at that melon farm in Emery County, UT, than what the regulators say in Salt Lake City.

The Environmental Protection Agency, in particular, is notorious for its top-down, Washington-knows-best approach to regulation, which often runs roughshod over the immense diversity of local circumstances in our large country.

Too often, the EPA treats States and State regulators not as partners but as adversaries. It treats the States themselves not as laboratories of republican democracy but, rather, as lab rats to be tested upon for their own amusement and for the exertion of their own political power.

Scott Pruitt understands this well because he has seen it firsthand as attorney general of Oklahoma. Mr. Pruitt has spent many years being ignored and pushed around by Washington, an experience that has taught him the need for the EPA to work with and not condescend to the States.

In his Senate confirmation hearing, Mr. Pruitt explained why improving the relationship between the EPA and State-level regulators is the best way to protect our environment and uphold the separation of powers that is the cornerstone of our constitutional system. He said: "Cooperative Federalism is at the heart of many of the environmental statutes that involve the Environmental Protection Agency."

The reason for that is that it is the States that many times have the resources, the expertise, and an understanding of the unique challenges of protecting our environment and improving our water and our air. We need a true partnership between the EPA in performing its roll, along with the States in performing theirs. If we have that partnership, as opposed to punishment, as opposed to the uncertainty and duress that we currently see in the marketplace, I think we will have better air and better water quality as a result.

For many Americans—and certainly for many of my fellow Utahns—the EPA is pejorative. It is synonymous with an out-of-touch and out-of-control government.

This is a shame. Americans want—and Americans certainly deserve—clean air and clean water. The EPA has the potential to help them achieve these goals, but only if the EPA itself returns to its core mission and works

well, works wisely to accomplish that mission, and works within our constitutional system.

That is why I am so pleased that Scott Pruitt is on his way to lead the EPA. The Agency exists to protect the American people, not advance the narrow agenda of some special interests while punishing others.

I am confident that Mr. Pruitt is the right man for the job and that he will remain independent while correcting the troubling course that the EPA has taken in recent decades.

I thank the Chair.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CALLING FOR A SPECIAL COUNSEL

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, we are in a day—in fact, yet another day—of fast-developing, dramatic events. The news today that LTG Michael Flynn, who served until recently as National Security Advisor, may be culpable of lying to the FBI and therefore prosecutable for a Federal criminal violation adds urgency to the need for a special independent counsel to investigate all of the events surrounding his conversation with the Russian Ambassador and who knew what about it when and what was done.

The severity of this potential constitutional crisis—and we are careening toward a constitutional crisis—makes it all the more necessary that we have an objective and independent investigation, that Attorney General Jeff Sessions recuse himself, and the White House guarantee that documents are preserved—as we have requested in a letter sent by Members of the Judiciary Committee, including myself—today.

The severity of this potential constitutional crisis cannot be exaggerated. Still we are in the early days of a new administration but already the turmoil and turbulence throw into question almost all of the proceedings here on other issues, urgent and important issues—whether infrastructure, trade policy, job creation, economic growth, all of the pressing issues of our day. They also raise potential conflicts of interest on the part of other officials before us now, including the nomination of Scott Pruitt. News that we have also learned very recently, in this day of fast-developing events, increases the importance of deliberate and thoughtful consideration of this nomination.

Just within the last hour, a judge in Oklahoma has ordered the release of thousands of emails sent by this nominee, Scott Pruitt, the attorney general of Oklahoma, relevant to his dealings with oil and gas interests in his State and elsewhere on relevant legislative

and litigation issues. This development really requires a delay in this vote so we can review those emails and know what those conflicts of interest were, what they may continue to be, and whether his answers to our colleagues in his testimony at his confirmation hearing were completely accurate and truthful. We need to delve into those emails, know their contents, examine the contents, in fairness to him and in fairness to an administration that may be appointing for confirmation yet another official like General Flynn, who was forced to resign just days after his appointment.

The interests of the Trump administration, as well as this body, would be well served by delaying this vote so we can review those emails. I call upon the Republican leadership to delay this vote, give us a chance to review the emails, and give the American public a chance to understand how those emails reflect on the qualifications of Scott Pruitt and the potential conflicts of interest that may disqualify him from serving in this all-important role.

I am here to oppose the nomination of Scott Pruitt, but whether we oppose or approve of this nomination, we owe it to ourselves—I say to my colleagues—we owe it to the United States Senate to delay this vote so the potentially explosive material and contents of these emails can be fully considered. If we fail to delay, we are, in effect, potentially confirming a nominee who may be compelled to resign after his disqualifying conflicts of interest are exposed to public view. We have an obligation in advising and consenting to be as fully informed as possible. If there were no such emails, if there were no such court order, there might be an excuse for rushing to judgment as we are on track to do now. There is no excuse for a rush to confirmation. Our obligation to advise and consent implies also an obligation to review these emails as comprehensively and fully and fairly as possible before we make this decision.

The President has nominated Scott Pruitt as the next Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency to serve a mission, which is to protect human health and safeguard the environment. Even before disclosure of these emails, which involve his contacts with oil and gas interests, he came before us as perhaps one of the least-qualified people in the United States of America to serve in this position. I don't make this statement lightly. It may sound like hyperbole or exaggeration, but the fact is, anyone who studies Scott Pruitt's record as attorney general of his State—and I served as attorney general of mine so I know his position pretty well—can see that his record is antithetical and hostile to the mission and purpose of this Agency.

He is a potential Administrator who will take office at a critical juncture for our planet. Sea levels continue to rise, long-established weather patterns

have begun shifting, and the average global temperature is rapidly approaching 2 centigrades Celsius above preindustrial levels. That is an increase which many climate scientists believe may be a point of no return—no return for the planet, no return for us, no return for generations to come. We are at a historic moment.

The question will be whether Scott Pruitt will be dedicated to doing something about climate change, about the pollution of our air, streams, rivers, and oceans, whether he will be committed to enforcing the rules and laws that protect us against those dangers of degradation of our environment—degradation of the air we breathe, the water we drink, the open spaces we enjoy.

That is the same Scott Pruitt who was pressed by our colleagues during his confirmation hearing and could not name a single regulation designed to protect clean air or water that he supports—the very same Scott Pruitt, who was asked by our colleague JEFF MERKLEY whether he agreed with the statement, “Warming of the climate system is unequivocal,” and he dodged and equivocated. When he was questioned about hundreds of thousands of dollars he has received in campaign contributions from energy companies, he basically refused to answer. He dodged the question. That is the Scott Pruitt who would become Administrator of the EPA, and it is the same Scott Pruitt who, as attorney general of Oklahoma, fought the tremendous progress made by the Obama administration at every turn, taking legal action against the EPA no fewer than 14 times.

While he was in office, he worked hand in hand with Oklahoma’s largest energy companies to roll back regulations that are vital to the health and well-being of the American people, not just the people of Oklahoma, as bad as that would be, but of all Americans, all of our planet.

When he worked hand in hand with the Oklahoma energy industry, those common bonds of purpose and work would be well illuminated by these emails that today will be disclosed. In fact, maybe some of those conflicts of interest will be revealed and dramatized by those emails. That is why we must wait to have this confirmation vote.

He sued to try and block efforts to reduce nationwide emissions of methane, a greenhouse gas roughly 30 times more effective at trapping even carbon dioxide. He block the Clean Power Plan. He took three separate actions against the EPA’s mercury and air toxic rule, targeting standards that the EPA estimates will save 45,000 lives. Those are three more actions, it should be noted, than he took to proactively promote clean air and clean water on behalf of the people of Oklahoma in his entire time in office. Why did he take those actions? Who helped him do it? How and why? The emails will help tell that story and answer those questions.

Taken alone, even without the emails, these actions hardly show a record of someone dedicated to promoting and protecting the environment. Not once during his confirmation process did Mr. Pruitt demonstrate to me a convincing willingness, let alone eagerness, to uphold the mission of the Agency he now hopes to run, nor has he shown an intent to be open and responsive with Members of this body. Most troubling of all, he has, in no uncertain terms, failed to give any indication that he will be a champion for our environment and that he will advance scientifically sound policies to protect the public’s health.

The only thing Attorney General Pruitt has made abundantly clear is that he holds a derisively dismissive attitude toward the Agency he now seeks confirmation to lead. His nomination is an affront to the EPA, but even more, it is a threat to our health, a threat to our environment, a threat to the quality of our air and water, and a risky gamble on the world we will leave to our children and our grandchildren.

There is a very real concern about whose side Scott Pruitt will be on. The question is, Whose side will he be on when and if he is Administrator of the EPA? He has already shown a willingness to use the power of whatever office he holds to advance an extreme agenda and to malign opponents. Polluters do not need another champion in this administration, and our environment does not need another foe. We have enough foxes guarding henhouses as it is in this administration.

Mr. Pruitt’s coziness with the firms that he will be required to regulate—again the emails will tell the story about his relationships with special interests. That is critically important, and, in fact, even on the record we have now, it should disqualify him from this position.

He doubts the effects of climate change and the extent to which our rapidly warming climate is as a result of human activity, calling this debate “far from settled” and placing himself well outside mainstream opinion. His denials are rooted in the promise of funds from corporations and interest groups that think it is far better for their bottom line to pretend that incontrovertible climate change simply doesn’t exist.

He is a beneficiary of the denying corporations and special interests, and those contentions are not only regressive and fallacious but dangerous. If he is a prisoner of those special interests, as these emails may show him to be, my colleagues will regret voting for him—another reason that delaying his confirmation vote is appropriate and necessary now.

The scientific evidence of climate change and human involvement is overwhelming. You don’t have to look hard to see it. Most of us in this Chamber would need to speak only with a handful of our constituents—the men

and women who sent us here—to see the real impact this crisis is having.

My home State of Connecticut has experienced a major rise in storms that have cost hundreds of millions of dollars in damage as well as several lives. It seems that as soon as our State begins to rebuild from one storm, another wreaks havoc on many of the same devastated communities. These monster storms have become the new normal.

In Connecticut and around the country, weather disasters are rapidly becoming part of a way of life, tragically, for innocent people caught in their wake. In just 6 years, Connecticut has weathered the damage and destruction of a freak October snowstorm, Superstorm Sandy, and the force of numerous nor’easters. Severe storms like these, as well as other disasters—floods, tornadoes, droughts—are happening at a rate four times greater than just 30 years ago.

I am not here to argue climate change. I am here to argue that Scott Pruitt is unqualified to fight climate change because he denies it is a problem, and he denies the mission and purpose of the EPA as a vital purpose and mission of our Federal Government.

The people of Connecticut understand climate change, and they get it. They understand that it is happening and that it is happening in their everyday lives. They see its effects. They know its causes, and they know the truth. It will get worse. We need to take action.

This body is on the verge of action that should be postponed so that we can consider vitally important information in those emails that reflects on conflicts of interest, ties to special interests, influence on Scott Pruitt, benefits to him in the past, and debts that he may owe, literally and figuratively, to those special interests that may impact his performance as Administrator of the EPA.

As attorney general of my State, environmental protection was a priority to me. I will be honest; I sued the Federal Government, just as Scott Pruitt did. I sued the Federal Government so that environmental protection would be made more rigorous and stringent and people would be protected, not to slow down the EPA but to speed it up to provide impetus for its action and, in fact, to compel it to carry out its mission and purpose.

Scott Pruitt has acted in exactly the opposite way, and the reasons for his antipathy and hostility to the EPA may well be illustrated even more dramatically and directly by these emails that we should consider.

I urge the Republican leadership to postpone and delay this vote so that we may, in fact, consider those emails.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I want to first thank Senator CARPER for his leadership today, and I rise today

to join him in speaking about the nomination of Scott Pruitt to be Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

I will not be voting in favor of Mr. Pruitt's nomination for EPA Administrator because of his record and views on issues that are very important to the people of my State—issues like climate change, which matters in Minnesota, and issues like the Renewable Fuel Standard. I am not sure everyone has focused on that today, but I think it is important, especially for States in the Midwest, to focus on what his record has been on this issue.

Mr. Pruitt has written that the climate change debate is “far from settled” and has made other troubling comments about climate change. I could not disagree more. I believe that the debate on whether climate change is happening is over. The facts are in, and the science is clear.

The “2014 National Climate Assessment” stated the most recent decade was the Nation’s warmest on record. U.S. temperatures are expected to continue to rise. It was drafted by over 300 authors and extensively reviewed by the National Academy of Sciences and a Federal advisory committee of 60 members.

The “Quadrennial Defense Review 2014” of the Department of Defense of the United States stated: “The pressures caused by climate change will influence resource competition while placing additional burdens on economies, societies, and governance institutions around the world.”

Climate change isn’t just about melting glaciers and rising ocean levels, although it is certainly about that. It is also about what we have experienced in the Midwest. When I first got to the Senate, I remember hearing from experts, including people in our own Defense Department and major military leaders who talked about the fact that one of the consequences of climate change will be, first of all, all over the world in economies that are already struggling. We are going to see some of those developing nations encounter unpredictable weather—hurricanes, tsunamis.

In the Midwest, while we may not have tsunamis, what we see is major, unpredictable weather, which is just as dangerous. We have seen the devastating impacts of natural disasters like Hurricane Matthew, and we have seen flooding from Cedar Rapids and Duluth.

We now know the risk of climate change to Minnesota, to our country, and to our planet. We must reduce greenhouse gas and tackle the challenge of global climate change head-on. If we don’t tackle this issue, we are going to continue to struggle with the far-reaching economic and environmental consequences.

Shifting global trends have the potential to wreak more long-term havoc on our businesses and our industries. That is why businesses in my State—

major companies like Cargill and General Mills—have been willing to take this on, have been willing to talk about this as a problem. They see this as a moral obligation to their employees and their customers, but they also see it as part of their business. They can’t simply continue in business and serve people all over the world if major economies could be ruined by one storm or if we see areas flooded that are on our coast or the kind of weather we have seen in the Midwest. It is bad for business, and they are willing to admit that.

As a Senator from Minnesota with a strong ag industry and also a tradition of hunting and fishing, I see climate change as a direct threat to my State’s economy for recreation. It is also a threat to our State’s heritage of enjoying the outdoors, whether that is snowmobiling or whether that is our wildlife. We have seen some major changes to the wildlife in our State.

I have always believed that an “all of the above” plan is necessary to build a new energy agenda for America, but it must be an agenda that recognizes the challenges of climate change. Someone who heads up the EPA must believe in science. It is an Agency grounded in science.

Mr. Pruitt has also been quoted as saying “the ethanol fuel mandate is unworkable.” I know he has changed some of his views since he was nominated, but I, as a Senator from a State that relies on renewable fuels as one of our major industries in the ag part of our State, must look at his entire record and what he has actually said when he has been in positions of power.

How do I see the Renewable Fuel Standard? The Renewable Fuel Standard has led to important advancements in clean energy, and the standard has provided stability and predictability that have and will continue to drive long-term investments in the renewable space.

Every time a new study is released on the subject, I become even more convinced that investments in renewable fuels are investments in the future health of our economy and our environment. A recent study by ABF Economics showed that the ethanol industry generated \$7.37 billion in gross sales in 2015 for Minnesota businesses and \$1.6 billion in income for Minnesota households. Here is a big one: The ethanol industry also supports over 18,000 full-time jobs in Minnesota.

Senators on both sides of the aisle understand that renewable fuels are important as a home-grown economic generator. They also are about 10 percent of our fuel supply in the United States. That is a competitor for oil. When we have that kind of competition, that allows us to have everything from electric cars to other kinds of renewables, and we should not simply rely on the oil industry to fuel our vehicles. Renewable fuels are an important competitor.

As I mentioned, there is strong bipartisan support for renewable fuels. I

have worked closely with many friends across the aisle for many years on this issue. And, of course, the further ethanol and renewable fuels take us, the less dependent we will be on foreign oil. We need and want a mixed fuel supply.

Now is not the time to waiver on support for renewable fuels. The EPA Administrator has many flexibilities under the law to slow or make changes to the Renewable Fuel Standard, and that is why I am concerned about the past record of this nominee on this important issue.

Another reason we need consistent and effective leadership at the EPA is in the fight to maintain and restore the Great Lakes. Our Great Lakes contain 90 percent of our Nation’s supply of fresh surface water and supply drinking water to 30 million Americans. And our economy? The Great Lakes’ combined economic impact is so enormous that restoration alone is estimated to provide \$50 billion in long-term economic benefits. That is why last year’s Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act reauthorized the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. These projects have helped eliminate toxins from our waters, combat invasive species—something very critical in my State with invasive carp—protect against pollution, restore habitats for fish and wildlife, and promote the overall health.

The Administrator of the EPA is responsible for leading efforts to implement, administer, and distribute grant funding across agencies that undertake restoration activities. As I noted, Minnesota is home to a thriving outdoor economy that relies on clean water, free of invasive species. It is vital that our next EPA Administrator continue to take action to stop the spread of invasive carp before they reach the Great Lakes and many of our most important northern waters.

My background? My grandpa was an iron ore miner. He worked 1,500 feet underground in the mines most of his life. Every day when he went down in that cage, he would always think about what he would like to do in the outdoors. He loved to hunt. About once a year, they would borrow a car from my uncle. They would go to see Lake Superior, and he would bring his sons to see Lake Superior.

I want an EPA Administrator that sees that, yes, you want a strong economy, and yes, those things can work together with the environment, but you also need to preserve that outdoors and wildlife and those Great Lakes my grandpa and my family hold so dear.

Mr. Pruitt has articulated extreme views about the role of the EPA, but there is a bigger problem here. We still don’t know his full views and record. My colleagues who sat on the Environment and Public Works Committee have asked Mr. Pruitt to produce critical documents that will clarify his record and vision for the EPA, and 19 times, Mr. Pruitt told Senators they should get the information from his attorney general’s office. Well, they tried

and they have not succeeded. The Oklahoma attorney general's office told them that they have a 2-year backlog for such requests. In committee questions for the record, my colleagues asked Mr. Pruitt to clear the backlog and provide the committee with these communications. Once again, he declined. Mr. Pruitt has not provided the Senate with the information we need to make an informed decision about his nomination.

The EPA Administrator will be entrusted with protecting the health and well-being of Americans. This is a tremendous responsibility. That is why Americans deserve a clear picture of Mr. Pruitt's record on protecting public health, clean air, and clean water, including a review of the emails that were ordered to be released today.

RUSSIA

Now, Mr. President, I would like to turn to another topic. Actually, after watching parts of the President's lengthy and unpredictable news conference today, I came upon some of the parts dealing with Russia. I thought it was important that I come down to the floor and address them.

The part of the press conference that I saw was where the President referred to the reporting that has been done on Russia as fake news. The reporting that has been done about all of the contacts between members of his campaign and the Russian intelligence agencies—I assume he includes the reporting that has been done on the phone call that was made to the Russian Ambassador—and the various other reporting that we have seen—that is very troubling about this administration's dealing with Russia from the campaign time, to the transition, to the present.

I would just like to say that this is far from fake news; this is fact. And if you don't believe it is fact, then that means you don't believe 17 U.S. intelligence agencies and that instead you take the word of Russians, Russian intelligence and Putin's word. I go with our 17 U.S. intelligence agencies that have made it very clear that Russia had been attempting to influence our election.

This was borne out to me when Senator McCain, Senator Graham, and I visited the Baltics, Ukraine, and Georgia at the end of last year in December. What we saw there and what we heard there makes us know that this is not just one single incident of Russia trying to influence one candidate's campaign or even one election or even one country's election, but that this is a modus operandi, that they have done this before. They did it in Estonia when they were mad that they moved a statue. What did they do? They shut down their internet. They did it in Lithuania when the Lithuanians had the audacity to invite members of the Ukrainian Parliament who were in exile because they were part of the legally annexed Crimea. Lithuania invites them to their 25th anniversary

celebration of their independence from Russia. What happens? Russia attacks the accounts of members of the Lithuanian Parliament.

I have already expressed deep concern about this administration's lack of transparency on a variety of critical issues, but nowhere is this more true than when it comes to this administration's interactions with the Russian Government. For months, U.S. intelligence agencies have said that Russia used covert cyber attacks, espionage, and harmful propaganda—\$200 million worth—to try to undermine our democracy. Reports show it and the facts prove it.

Unlike what the President said today at the press conference, this is not fake news. Last week, in fact, we learned that the very day President Obama imposed sanctions on Russia for their unprecedented attacks on our democracy, a member of the Trump transition team spoke to a senior Russian official regarding those sanctions and then did not tell the truth about it. The National Security Advisor—the person charged with the most sensitive matters of U.S. national security—misled the Vice President and, in turn, the American people. We have now seen two people resign: the campaign manager for Trump's campaign and the National Security Advisor. And one of the things they have in common is Russia and a relationship with Russia.

So, no, this is not what the President said at his press conference today or earlier in a tweet. This is not about some kind of sour grapes—those were not his words but his implication about the loss of Hillary Clinton. That is not what this is. This is not about her loss in the last campaign. No. These are facts that have emerged since that time that I think are important to everyone.

I appreciated the words a few months ago from Senator Rubio, who said that this is not about one campaign, this is not about one election, because it could quickly turn on the other party. We have an obligation as Senators to protect our democracy. That is what this is about—to make sure we have fair and free elections that are not influenced by foreign governments.

Today, Secretary Mattis said that Russia's behavior is aggressive and destabilizing. I thought that was a good caricature of not only what we have seen in our own country but also what we have seen overseas. And then he went on to say that right now we are not negotiating from a position of strength. Well, that is certainly true when our own President then, a few hours later, takes to the stage and says that this is simply fake news and that we are talking about Russia's aggression as some kind of response to the loss in the last campaign.

We need to know the full extent of the administration's contact with the Russian Government during the campaign and transition, including what was said, what was done, and who knew

about it. Only then will we answer that fourth “w.” Who, what, where—it is the only way we are going to answer why. Why is this administration so focused on trying to placate Russia?

I recently joined Senators CARDIN, LEAHY, FEINSTEIN, and CARPER—this was early January—to introduce legislation that would create an independent, nonpartisan commission to look at the facts and to make recommendations about how we can handle future elections so they will be free and safeguarded from foreign interference. This would, of course, be in addition to the thorough investigation that I have been ensured will occur with the Intelligence Committee under the leadership of Senators BURR and WARNER.

In the last few weeks, we have heard a lot about the three branches of government and our system of checks and balances. One of the fundamental jobs of Congress is to closely oversee the executive branch to ensure that the law is being properly followed and enforced. I think my colleagues on both sides of the aisle understand how important that is.

I am the ranking member of the Senate Rules Committee, and one of our jobs is to oversee our election system. A big part of my job as the Democratic leader of this committee will be to ensure that our election system is safe from foreign interference in the future.

Intelligence experts have been clear: Russian interference in our 2016 election was not an anomaly. The threat of future tampering is real and immediate. As Senator Rubio said and I just noted, this time it was the Democrats who were attacked. Next time it could be a Republican. And it is not something that is limited to one party. Future threats could come in the form of more misinformation. They could range from using social media to disrupt the voting process to even hacking into State reporting websites to alter vote totals. Russia's goal is to create confusion and undermine people's trust in our democratic institutions. That is why they spent \$200 million last year to fund the spread of fake news.

We need solutions and not more problems. Just last week, the House voted to eliminate the Election Assistance Commission, the only Federal agency charged with protecting American elections from hacking. As ranking member of the Rules Committee, I find this unconscionable. We have to do more, not less, to protect American elections from foreign interference.

The EAC and the Department of Homeland Security were in communication with State election officials prior to election day promoting cyber security best practices. Our agencies have ensured that safeguards, like provisional ballots, would allow people to cast ballots even if their systems were hacked. We have to do more, not less, to support this effort. That is why I am currently developing legislation that