

can access the directory for information on the collection of defaulted student loans or the collection of delinquent Federal loans, but the GAO—the Government Accountability Office—has not been allowed access to this directory.

Now, by clarifying that the GAO has the authority to access the National Directory of New Hires, we can ensure that the taxpayers' watchdog is more easily able to do its job and root out Federal overpayments as well as waste, fraud, and abuse.

Federal agencies reported nearly \$125 billion in improper payments in fiscal year 2014 alone—that is \$125 billion with a “b.” By allowing the GAO access to this directory, Congress will provide the office with a critical tool that can help save taxpayers billions of dollars in unnecessary waste.

Once again, I thank the Senator from Nebraska for reaching across the aisle and working in a bipartisan fashion. This bill has strong support from Senators on both sides of the aisle, and—guess what—it passed unanimously in the House of Representatives.

I agree with folks across the country who have made themselves heard. They want a more transparent government, a more accountable government, and a more efficient government, and that is exactly what this bill does. That is why I encourage a “yes” vote on this good-government bill today.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mr. SASSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that all remaining debate time on H.R. 72 be yielded back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill was ordered to a third reading and was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill pass?

Mr. SASSE. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Alabama (Mr. SESSIONS).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 99, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 28 Leg.]

YEAS—99

Alexander	Burr	Coons
Baldwin	Cantwell	Corker
Barrasso	Capito	Cornyn
Bennet	Cardin	Cortez Masto
Blumenthal	Carper	Cotton
Blunt	Casey	Crapo
Booker	Cassidy	Cruz
Boozman	Cochran	Daines
Brown	Collins	Donnelly

Duckworth	Kennedy	Roberts
Durbin	King	Rounds
Enzi	Klobuchar	Rubio
Ernst	Lankford	Sanders
Feinstein	Leahy	Sasse
Fischer	Lee	Schatz
Flake	Manchin	Schumer
Franken	Markey	Scott
Gardner	McCain	Shaheen
Gillibrand	McCaskill	Shelby
Graham	McConnell	Stabenow
Grassley	Menendez	Sullivan
Harris	Merkley	Tester
Hassan	Moran	Thune
Hatch	Murkowski	Tillis
Heinrich	Murphy	Toomey
Heitkamp	Murray	Udall
Heller	Nelson	Van Hollen
Hirono	Paul	Warner
Hoeven	Perdue	Warren
Inhofe	Peters	Whitehouse
Isakson	Portman	Wicker
Johnson	Reed	Wyden
Kaine	Risch	Young

NOT VOTING—1
Sessions

The bill (H.R. 72) was passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

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

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

NOMINATION OF SCOTT PRUITT

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, having Scott Pruitt in charge of the EPA is bad for the air we breathe and the water we drink, and it is bad for American leadership on climate. It is not just that I have a different view from Mr. Pruitt on the Environmental Protection Agency, it is that he has made a career out of undermining the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. It is not just that he is a Republican or that he doesn't share my views about clean energy.

Look, I understand that when a Republican administration comes in, their EPA nominee is going to have a different view of what the Agency ought to be doing. I am not suggesting that we are going to get Henry Waxman or JEFF MERKLEY to run the EPA. That is not what is going on here. Here is what it is, and I want people to listen carefully.

Scott Pruitt is a professional climate denier. That is his job. He has made his political bones trying to shred the EPA's ability to enforce the laws that protect clean air and clean water. The core mission of the EPA is to safeguard

public health by enforcing the laws on the books, and the cornerstones of the EPA's authorities are the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act. These laws were passed over 40 years ago with huge bipartisan majorities, and they have been extremely successful.

It is especially important for the dozens of young people watching C-SPAN right now to understand that the state of the environment in the late 1960s was catastrophic, like out of a science fiction movie. Even for those of us who were around, it is a good reminder of what the EPA has accomplished over the decades.

The Cuyahoga River in Ohio was so polluted that it caught on fire. Lake Erie was so polluted that almost nothing could live in it. Bacteria levels in the Hudson River were 170 times above levels that could be considered safe. Raw sewage was directly discharged into rivers and streams where children swam. The FDA found that 87 percent of U.S. swordfish contained so much mercury that they were unfit for human consumption. Then the Clean Water Act was passed. We made incredible progress in the last 44 years. We still have a long way to go, as about one-third of our waterways are not yet fishable and swimmable, as the law requires.

Scott Pruitt's opposition to the Clean Water Act and EPA makes me terrified that we could go back to the bad old days of water pollution. EPA's enforcement of the Clean Air Act is an even bigger success story. This law has saved millions of lives and improved the health of millions of others. EPA's enforcement of the law has reduced air pollution by 70 percent since 1970. Smog levels in L.A. have fallen two-thirds since their peak. Lead in the air is down 98 percent, carbon monoxide down 85 percent, sulfur dioxide down 80 percent. Acid rain is down over 50 percent and at a fraction of the anticipated cost. But this progress is in real jeopardy.

As the Oklahoma attorney general and as the head of the Republican Attorneys General Association, he dismantled the unit in his office charged with enforcing Federal environmental laws and stood up a unit to undermine Federal environmental law. He led the opposition to the Clean Power Plan. He sued the Federal Government over a dozen times to prevent the implementation of rules that would protect our health and our environment. What he does is fight the EPA. That is his thing.

As Oklahoma attorney general, he literally—I am not making this up—he literally copied and pasted a letter from a major oil company onto his official State attorney general letterhead and then sent it to the EPA as though it were his own.

I have never met Mr. Pruitt—and I assume he is personally a good guy—so I will say it like this: A person who works so closely with industries that

pollute our air and water is an unusually bad fit to run the EPA. Never before in the history of the EPA has a President nominated someone so opposed to the EPA to run it, and on the most significant environmental challenge of our generation, he is aggressively wrong. He has said that the climate debate is “far from settled” and that “scientists continue to disagree about the degree and extent of global warming and its connections to the actions of mankind.” This, of course, is nuts. The climate debate is settled and has been for some time. More than 97 percent of climate scientists agree that the climate is changing and that humans are responsible. Ask a scientist, ask a farmer, ask a fisherman, ask a skier or snowboarder. If you don’t believe 97 percent of scientists, will you at least believe your own eyes?

His position even puts him at odds with the Department of Defense, which has called climate change a “threat multiplier.” Here is the good news. We are actually making a lot of progress in clean energy, almost all of it in the private sector. The cost of solar power has dropped by 60 percent in the last 10 years and more new solar capacity was added in 2016 than any other energy source. Wind power was by far the largest source added to the grid in 2015. Clean energy generation grew by about 20 percent in the last year, and the long-term extensions of the renewable energy tax credits give us hope to think that kind of trajectory can be sustained. This comes at a time when public concern about climate change is at an alltime high, and with three-quarters of Americans, including half of Republicans, supporting Federal efforts to reduce carbon pollution.

This progress is fragile, and confirming Scott Pruitt can undermine our momentum. Again, here is Mr. Pruitt in his own words about the Clean Power Plan: “The EPA does not possess the authority under the Clean Air Act to accomplish what it proposes in the unlawful Clean Power Plant.” This is flat wrong.

Let me quickly explain a lawsuit called *Massachusetts v. EPA*. The Supreme Court ruled that the Clean Air Act requires the EPA to regulate air pollution and carbon pollution as a pollutant so it is not only that the EPA may regulate greenhouse gas emissions, under the Clean Air Act they are actually required to do so. Mr. Pruitt has bragged that he “led the charge with repeated notices and subsequent lawsuits against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.”

On climate change, he has said:

Is it truly manmade or is it just simply another period of time when the Earth is cooling, increasing in heat? Is it just typical, natural type of occurrences as opposed [to] what the administration says?

I cannot think of a person more ill-suited to run this Agency.

On clean energy, the Chinese are leading. Mexico is leading. Europe is leading, Germany, Africa. The question

isn’t whether the clean energy revolution will occur, the question is whether we will lead it or get left in the dust.

This is where we are. A nominee who does not understand the vital role of clean air, clean water, and protecting the environment has been nominated to lead the EPA, who denies decades of scientific research.

To my Republican colleagues, I have had many encouraging, rational conversations about climate with you but almost exclusively in private. I say this. This vote is the litmus test, the one your grandkids will ask you about. I know being in the Senate is about making choices—and lots of times it is great—but this issue, this vote is absolutely simple: Don’t vote for a climate denier. You cannot dabble in conservation or energy efficiency or vote for a budget amendment recognizing the scientific consensus on climate change and then vote yes on this nominee. If you say you are not a climate denier, this is the point in your career when you get to prove it. If we find another nominee, even one who hates the Clean Power Plan, who shares your view on federalism, who shares your view about the United Nations, about President Obama, that is fair, that is fine, but this nominee is out of bounds.

Please, consult your voters, your university experts, talk to your kids. It is their planet. It is their future—or consult with your own conscience.

I know sometimes politics is complicated and the right thing to do is not that easy to determine in the fog of the battle. This is not one of those times. For future generations, for the planet, for the future of the Republican Party, you have to get this one right. If you are not a climate denier, do not put one in charge of the Environmental Protection Agency.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, today I rise to talk about a critically important position in the Trump administration Cabinet: The Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA is charged with making sure that all Americans are safeguarded from major environmental threats to human health, where they live, where they learn, and where they work.

Originally proposed by a Republican administration, the EPA’s mission has been supported by Democrats, Republicans, and Independents alike. Clean air to breathe and clean water to drink are basic human needs that we all must work to protect. Disagreements involving the EPA usually stem from how to best preserve our vital resources, and we certainly welcome those debates in the Senate.

Oftentimes, the role of the Environmental Protection Agency is to provide a check and balance to activities that pollute our air, dirty our waterways, and contaminate our land. This is why I am so troubled by the nomination of Scott Pruitt as EPA Administrator.

Mr. Pruitt’s track record on environmental issues as Oklahoma’s attorney general is, in a word, dismal.

I am particularly concerned about the influence of the fossil fuel industry over Mr. Pruitt’s decisions and actions. As Oklahoma’s attorney general, he filed 148 lawsuits against the EPA to undermine their efforts. In 13 of those cases, companies that gave political donations to Mr. Pruitt also joined in that suit. As ranking member of the Science Subcommittee, I am worried that scientific data of the Environmental Protection Agency will be minimized, suppressed, or politicized. Mr. Pruitt has tried to instill doubt in the strong consensus of global climate change scientists, claiming that the debate on fundamental scientific principles is far from settled.

If his confirmation goes through, I am concerned that the work of EPA scientists may be edited, twisted, or buried to protect special interests and prevent necessary action. Many Michiganders are rightfully afraid that Mr. Pruitt will not enforce our bedrock environmental laws like the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. We have seen him fight against these very laws from his current position.

All across the Nation, communities are dealing with contamination and environmental catastrophes. Rural and urban communities alike depend on the strength of these laws as well as EPA’s resources and their expertise. For example, the people of Flint, MI, are still suffering through devastating effects of a catastrophic drinking water crisis. The Environmental Protection Agency is heavily involved to make sure the drinking water in Flint will be safe and the National Safe Drinking Water Act rules will be updated. I am very concerned that the EPA will ignore the lessons learned after the Flint water crisis under Administrator Pruitt, and Flint is not the only community facing a water quality crisis. For example, Monroe County—which gets its water from Lake Erie—has seen its drinking water affected because of toxins in western Lake Erie.

Algae blooms—a result of runoff pollution—have made their way into drinking water intakes. Harmful algal blooms are a problem that scientists say will only get worse as we see higher temperatures and more precipitation in the future.

In addition to providing safe drinking water, I am concerned that enforcement of clean air policies would be weakened. Keeping our air clean isn’t just about climate change. It is about keeping pollutants out of the lungs of our children. People in places like Southwest Detroit and St. Clair County all too often suffer the harmful impacts from poor air quality. Detroit has some of the highest child asthma rates in the entire country. Children can’t learn if they are too sick to be in school.

Mr. Pruitt has a record we can look at, and it is very extreme. He has attacked measures that reduced interstate smog pollution, including protections against arson and mercury. If Mr. Pruitt has sought to weaken these protections around the country that protect us from poisons like arsenic and mercury, I think we have to ask the question, If he is confirmed, will he be protecting American families or will he be protecting the bottom line of multinational corporations?

To those who welcome Mr. Pruitt's approach of attacking the EPA, I would say strengthening our economy and our environment are not mutually exclusive. In fact, each effort depends on the success of the other. We must protect our natural resources so future generations will be able to sustainably use them.

Businesses can only attract top talent and jobs to the United States if we have clean places to live and to work and if we have a healthy workforce. Sick days brought on by environmental toxins hurt small businesses, and environmental catastrophes can decimate a lifetime's worth of equity built up by homeowners.

Smart, effective protections can be good, not just for our physical health but for our economic health as well. Previous EPA nominees from both parties have understood these basic principles. What separates Mr. Pruitt from past EPA nominees is his contempt for the mission of the Environmental Protection Agency and his disregard for the science that provides the very foundation for the Agency's actions.

Just as I would not vote to confirm a fox to guard a henhouse, I will not vote to confirm Mr. Pruitt to safeguard our Nation's environment.

I urge my colleagues to join me to oppose Mr. Pruitt's nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I spent the last few days having town hall meetings at home. It was a big challenge. We had a tremendous amount of snow. The distinguished Presiding Officer is very familiar with that. We had the most snow since 1937, and it just goes on and on. We are battling freezing rain. Yet Oregonians came out in big numbers to participate in the discussion about what is going on in Washington, DC. They were particularly troubled about what was being done at the Environmental Protection Agency in the nomination of Scott Pruitt to head it. We had 200 people in McMinnville on Saturday night, a small community. I think the temperature was about 22 degrees. What really troubled them is that it sure looks like, when you examine the record of Mr. Pruitt, that he is trampling on everything we call the Oregon Way. The Oregon Way is something that Democrats, Republicans, people across the political spectrum subscribe to because it involves protecting our treasured land, air, and water. It was something

we want for our generation, and we will pass it on to our kids, and it has been hugely valuable to us in attracting more industries that pay well because the workers at those industries want clean air and clean water.

When you look at Mr. Pruitt's career, it really upends everything that I would call the Oregon Way—repeated attempts to weaken or eliminate health-based environmental standards, air quality standards for toxic air pollutants, limits on carbon emissions to take on the challenge of climate change. These rollbacks are particularly harmful to children and low-income households, communities of color, minorities, families, and communities.

Yesterday, Senator MERKLEY and I spoke at our wonderful Martin Luther King Day Breakfast put on by The Skanner. Bernie and Bobbie Foster have been doing this for years. All I could think of is, if you roll back clean air and health standards, the people who are going to be hurt the most are low-income minorities, and communities of color. I don't see a big outcry in America for policies that would do that kind of harm to some of the most vulnerable Americans.

Mr. Pruitt also has a troubling history of denying that fundamental science really ought to be the basis of American policymaking when it comes to environmental protection.

For example, he disputed the Agency's science-based findings in 2009 that greenhouse gases endanger public health and welfare. Now, my view is that this is an inarguable and unfortunate reality of climate change. But Mr. Pruitt's challenge suggests either a misunderstanding about how environmental agencies ought to make science-based decisions or, even worse, a habit of setting science aside when the outcome is at odds with the special interests.

Again, that comes back to the kind of comments that were made during my five town hall meetings over the last few days at home. People would say: Look, Democrats and Republicans at home in Oregon, great Republican Governors—particularly led by the late Tom McCall—they would constantly come back to the proposition that you should not let the special interests trample on your treasures, your land and your air and your water, because not only was it bad for this generation—our generation—but it would be particularly damaging to our young people.

So it is really troubling that this has been the choice of the President-elect. My own view is that when it comes to environmental standards, one of the unsung successes of the last few years has been a rule cutting emissions of mercury, arsenic, lead, and other dangerous materials. It prevented, in 2016, 11,000 premature deaths. My concern is that a lot of those deaths would be seen in minority communities and communities of color, the people I was con-

cerned about when we had our Martin Luther King Day Breakfast.

Mr. Pruitt worked hard to gut that rule. He really pulled out all the stops to oppose a rule cutting emissions of mercury, arsenic, lead and dangerous heavy metals. He worked hard to gut it. If he is confirmed, he may just possibly be successful.

Now, the message that I have heard again and again is that we can do better than this. We can do better than this. I think the American people, when they see what is at stake—it has been hard to follow all of the hearings. I know that I was very interested in the questioning in the Foreign Relations Committee by the Presiding Officer. I was trying to follow all the nominations, and I could not get to all the hearings. I could not follow all of the questioning that I thought was important.

But even when all of this is going on, when people tell you before a Trailblazers game—at home in Portland, a pregame event—that they are unhappy about the environmental rules and the prospects of the environmental rules being gutted by the new head of the EPA, you know that you have people alarmed.

Oregon is no stranger to the threats of pollution. In 2015, there was a discovery that heavy metals, including cadmium and arsenic, had been emitted for decades into the air of Portland neighborhoods at dangerous levels.

This pollution was caused by a regulatory loophole the size of Crater Lake. At the time, I called on the Environmental Protection Agency to take action. Within days, they were on the ground in Portland helping to assess the public health risks. Not long after, they identified the cause of the regulatory oversight and corrected course.

It seems to me that Americans need to trust that the Environmental Protection Agency will be able to defend their communities from air pollution or from water contamination. That is how we have always looked at it in my home State of Oregon. We always felt that we could trust those that we elected of both political parties for years and years to say: You don't mess with Oregon's land and air and water.

Now, obviously, we have continued, even with that ethic, to have problems. While I was pleased that we were able to get some significant public health changes after we made that discovery in 2015 that there were heavy metals, including cadmium and arsenic, in the air of our neighborhoods, we have to do better. We have to do better at every level of government, and the EPA plays a critical role in ensuring clean and safe water, whether the water is running through a mountain stream or through a pipe to a Portland kitchen. Cities across the country, like my home town of Portland, are facing threats with high levels of lead in the water supply and outdated infrastructure to fix the problem.

These communities are counting on the Environmental Protection Agency

to be in a partnership with them to get this fixed to enforce strong water quality standards, and it only can happen if you have strong leadership that starts at the top. The American people have a right to have confidence that the head of the Environmental Protection Agency is going to defend the health and well-being of our communities and not the profits and the pocketbooks of the most powerful special interests in our country.

I am going to close by saying that I am not confident that a Pruitt EPA will stand on the side of those families against the special interests. That is why tonight I state that I will be opposing the nomination of Mr. Scott Pruitt to head the Environmental Protection Agency.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RUBIO). The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I join with my colleagues today. I appreciate the Senator from Oregon and his remarks. I join with him and the others who have spoken to express my grave concerns about the nomination of Scott Pruitt as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

It is really unacceptable to me that someone who denies climate change science could be put in charge of an agency that is really tasked with advancing our national strategy to address climate change and the ills resulting. Mr. Pruitt has said—the overwhelming evidence to the contrary—that the debate is far from settled. He denies what is happening in regards to the evidence and the science and the conclusions of the near consensus of scientists.

Time and again, this attorney general from Oklahoma, Mr. Pruitt, has filed suits actually to block the EPA's clean air and clean water regulations protocols, which have allowed the United States to lead the efforts to reduce carbon emissions and address the climate crisis we face.

There are few issues, in my opinion, that are as urgent as this, and across the globe that we must meaningfully do something collectively about. America must lead and not have a leader on this issue that is now so far out of step with global consensus. Everyone, from scientists and climate experts to business leaders and even our own military officials, understands that climate change is a real threat, not just to our environment but also to our economy, to the health of our people and our national security.

It is disturbing that, in a way—and it also defies common sense—if you hear the way some people talk about climate change, including our President-elect and Mr. Pruitt, you might think that not only is climate change not a problem but that it is not our problem. This could not be further from the truth. We are already, here in America, dealing with and seeing the very real impact of climate change.

Ask anyone living in my home State along the shore or a family in Lou-

isiana whose home has been destroyed by severe flooding or a farmer whose land has become barren from the droughts in California whether or not these consequences are real for their families. Yet, the President-elect and Mr. Pruitt not only refuse to acknowledge the consequences that we are facing but the dangerous and destructive path ahead. They are failing to face that if we fail to act.

Now, the facts of climate change are worth repeating. Air temperatures are rising. Ocean temperatures are increasing. The ocean is becoming far more acidic. Sea levels are rising, both because of expansion of warming oceans and because of the melting of land-based snow and ice that is now entering our oceans. Many mountain glaciers are melting away and the Arctic sea ice is decreasing.

Climate change is an American issue and it is a global issue. Addressing climate change should be a cause where we find agreement across political and geographic divides. In many ways, it already is. We have seen 36 Nobel prize winners come together in 2015 in a historic declaration on the threats of climate change. Brad Schmidt, winner of the 2011 Nobel Prize in Physics stated: “I see this issue as the single greatest threat to human prosperity.”

That is why, in late December 2015, 195 countries signed the Paris Agreement, a historic global agreement to meaningfully address climate change. That is why the Climate and Security Advisory Group, a nonpartisan group of 43 military and national security experts, including former military officials, spoke out to urge the next administration to “comprehensively address the security risks of climate change at all levels of national security planning.”

That is why more than 300 American businesses—significant economic engines of our economy—sent a letter to the President-elect urging him to address climate change and to continue America’s participation in the Paris Agreement, saying: “Implementing the Paris Agreement will enable and encourage businesses and investors to turn the billions of dollars in existing law-carbon investments into trillions of dollars the world needs to bring clean energy and prosperity to all.”

You see, that is the false narrative—that somehow people’s working on the climate change issue is done at the expense of businesses. But business leaders understand that there is a tremendous opportunity in the new economy—in a green-energy economy. There is tremendous agreement that America should be leading on this innovation and these ideas, not following that of others around the globe.

They are health care folks who understand the challenges to American health. That is why the American Lung Association warned that “climate change threatens the health of millions of people. While everyone is at risk for the harms of climate change and air

pollution, those most at risk include infants, children, older adults, and those with lung disease (such as asthma and COPD), cardiovascular disease or diabetes. They are the ones who must rush to the emergency room when they cannot breathe because of worsened ozone pollution during a heat wave, or when smoke blows into their yard from wildfires that may be burning hundreds of miles away.”

When we talk about climate change, we aren’t talking about ideology or opinion. We are talking about science and evidence. We are talking about national security. We are talking about creating greater economic prosperity, and obviously we are talking about public health.

America cannot sit idly by. We cannot be sidelined in this effort, not just because we produce such a significant amount of the climate-changing chemicals and byproducts but also because we don’t want to shirk the opportunities of being a leader in this space. And the American people really understand this. They understand that this isn’t a lose-lose, that this could be a win-win for America and the globe. And that is why, according to a Gallop poll from March of last year—it said clearly that the majority of Americans are worried about global warming, and the majority of Americans believe global warming is a result of manmade pollution.

I understand that for many people climate change is not an immediate urgency and reality, but, again, we should understand that right now, many of our more vulnerable Americans are suffering as a result. I see this when I go home from here in Washington to Newark. Newark has almost an epidemic level of asthma, with kids missing school because of this health and lung risk. The facts are clear: The pollutants kids breathe are real. For families living in communities on the shore in my State who are still rebuilding after Superstorm Sandy, the facts are clear: Their homes are being destroyed by unpredictable weather events. In New Jersey, we have seen the damage up and down our coast, with rising sea levels, flooding, and extreme weather.

We know that those who can least afford it—low-income, hard-working families—are severely impacted around the country. Communities that are poor, often minority populations, disproportionately endure pain and suffering related to changes in the weather due to climate change.

We know that when evacuation orders are given, those who can afford to leave their homes face a far different reality than those who have financial constraints.

Not only is it more difficult for working families to deal with climate-related issues, but the neighborhoods and communities in which they live are often the ones that are more affected by the rising temperatures and the pollution caused by climate change. One researcher who conducted a 2014 study

on the effects of climate change reported that “generally, higher poverty neighborhoods are warmer, and wealthier neighborhoods are cooler.” We see that in cities in New Jersey.

Multiple studies continue to show that poorer communities are more likely to be exposed to harmful pollutants than higher income communities. One study from the University of Minnesota found that Americans of color are exposed on average to 38 percent higher levels of outdoor nitrogen dioxide and that disparities in exposure amount to about 7,000 deaths a year from the health problems caused by these realities.

Climate change is already posing real dangers. The most recent National Climate Assessment released in 2014 noted that communities in rural America, as well as urban communities, have already experienced consequences of climate change, including “crop and livestock loss from severe drought and flooding, damage to levees and roads from extreme storms, shifts in planting and harvesting times, and large-scale losses from fires and other weather-related disasters.” The report concludes that “these impacts have profound effects, often significantly affecting the health and well-being of rural residents and communities.”

In States like Oklahoma, for example, where the State legislature mandated a study on the potential impacts of climate change, the group commissioned to do that study, the Oklahoma Climatological Survey, definitively concluded the following:

The Earth’s climate has warmed during the last 100 years. The Earth’s climate will continue to warm for the foreseeable future. Much of the global average temperature increases over the last 50 years can be attributed to human activities, particularly increasing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Oklahoma will be impacted.

Undoubtedly, New Jersey, Oklahoma—where Mr. Pruitt is from—and the rest of our country and the world will continue to be impacted by this problem, especially if America does not lead and falls behind.

We have made great strides, though, in addressing climate change under President Obama, including critical tax credits for wind and solar energy that not only help deal with climate change but also help American businesses thrive and lead, with now more people being employed by solar than coal. We have the historic Paris agreement and EPA regulations to reduce emissions from the electric power and transportation sectors. We are making strides of which we all should be proud, and actually our economy is benefiting as a result.

The United States has now emerged as a global leader in meaningfully addressing climate change. We cannot afford to slow down this progress, but I am afraid that under the leadership of President-Elect Donald Trump, that is exactly where we are headed. Despite scientific evidence, popular concern,

and the real-life impacts of climate change being evidenced in communities all across the country, all different backgrounds, from urban to rural, our President-elect and his nominee for the EPA, Attorney General Scott Pruitt, plan to advance special interests ahead of the common interest, of the global interest, of America’s interests.

The United States has a long legacy of leading, being a global leader in times of crisis, and at a time when we see the realities of climate change, at a time when we and many scientists are concluding that there is a global crisis and military leaders are concluding that we have a global crisis, at a time when we are seeing the effect of that crisis being made real in regions across our Nation and our planet Earth, America must not waiver in its commitment.

I believe the Environmental Protection Agency deserves a leader who is prepared to lead—not deny, not retreat, not equivocate, not surrender ground that we have gained. We deserve to have an EPA leader who is just that—someone who stands up to lead, who makes the difficult choices and finds ways to unify our country, to pull from the wisdom of the military, the wisdom of businesses, the wisdom of communities like the one in which I live, and chart a course for this country that helps to lead the globe, lead planet Earth out of this crisis and into the strength we can find through American leadership. I believe that is the task: that we can save our environment and create incredible prosperity in the future.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO JOHN SULLIVAN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today I want to take a few moments to acknowledge Illinois State Senator—and my friend—John Sullivan. John is one of the best and most decent men in politics—and there is no stronger advocate for the people of western Illinois. After all, they are John’s lifelong friends and family. He has been living and farming there his entire life. And after 14 years in the Illinois Senate, John retired and returned to the family business.

John Sullivan grew up on his family farm in Macomb, Nauvoo, and Hamilton. He spent his summers taking care of livestock and baling hay. In 1981, John graduated from Quincy College—known today as Quincy University—with a degree in history. After

college, he went to auction school and obtained his real estate license. He sold insurance before taking a job in Rushville with Production Credit Association.

He didn’t know anyone in Rushville—a town of just over 3,000 people—but he joined the local parish and quickly made friends. As fate would have it, Joan Merna moved to town and joined the same parish. Their friends decided to introduce them, and the rest is history. Today, John and Joan have been married for more than 33 years. And if you talk to their friends, they will tell you their marriage was one of the best things that happened to Rushville. They are a great team and have a wonderful family.

In 1986, John joined the family real estate and auction business, which his children and siblings still run today. Nearly 20 years later, he sat down with Joan at the kitchen table and decided to run for office. It was something he always wanted to do—and 2002 was as good a time as any. Before John, no one thought a Democrat could be elected Senator in western Illinois. For years, good candidates tried and failed. But John won office the old-fashioned way—by knocking on doors, walking in parades, and listening to people. He also had a secret weapon—six brothers and four sisters. Republicans said it was like running against the Walton family. And a couple of his brothers look just like John. The resemblance was so great that, during that first campaign, people sometimes thought John was everywhere all at once. They didn’t realize that sometimes they were seeing one of the Sullivan brothers.

John learned fast and rose in just a few years from a political novice to a leader of the Democratic Party in the Illinois Senate. If you want to see John’s legacy, you can look at the extensions of Route 336 and Route 67—main arteries that created hundreds of new jobs—and will continue to bring new jobs to the region long after we are gone. He has secured more than \$820 million for Western Illinois University in Macomb—and over \$16 million to keep the Quincy Veterans Home Guest House open.

But the greatest part of John’s legacy is the civility, reason, and dignity he has brought to his work—qualities that are needed in public service today. John understands that getting things done involves finding middle ground and getting along with people. Progress is a long march. It demands patience and perseverance. And sometimes, it requires the wisdom and humility to compromise, a lesson John learned from his parents, growing up as one of 11 children. When fights broke out, his parents didn’t get involved, they simply said: “Figure it out and just get along.” And they did. John took the same approach to governance and built his reputation as someone who is always willing to listen to the other side to see if there is a way to move forward