

Public Works Committee nomination hearing on Wehrum and Dourson, these captured nominees played dumb about the central issues and programs they will oversee if confirmed.

For instance, I asked Dourson if he agreed that “the tobacco industry manipulated and obfuscated scientific research into the dangers of smoking for decades.” Dourson, who conducted scientific studies designed, reviewed, and paid for by the tobacco industry and whose name is all over, in hundreds of places, the discovery records of the tobacco industry’s denial operation, replied: “I do not have firsthand knowledge to comment.”

I “do not have firsthand knowledge to comment”? This is the President’s selection to run the office that protects Americans from dangerous chemicals who doesn’t know the tobacco industry’s history of falsifying science? Please. He worked for them. He was part of it.

Remember that the tobacco industry was taken to court by the U.S. Department of Justice—back when the Department of Justice would take an industry to court—and the Department of Justice won a judgment declaring that tobacco had engaged in a fraud conspiracy to deny tobacco’s harms. Dourson sees no evil. He knows nothing.

I asked him whether he believes that hydrofluorocarbons are greenhouse gases and about the global warming potential of methane. His response: I am not sufficiently familiar with the definition of greenhouse gases and do not have the expertise to answer these questions.

He is not familiar with the definition of greenhouse gases? This is basic high school science. Every one of us has a home State university that teaches this stuff. This has been science for more than 100 years.

On to Hack Two, Bill Wehrum. When I asked Wehrum about carbon dioxide’s role in the observable effects of climate change, he replied: “The degree to which manmade greenhouse gas emissions are contributing to climate change has not been conclusively determined.” This claim just doesn’t match the scientific record.

The EPA—the very Agency to which Mr. Wehrum is nominated, along with NOAA—states that “carbon dioxide is the primary greenhouse gas that is contributing to recent climate change.” This consensus is held by published climate scientists, by scientific agencies and societies, by all of our National Laboratories, and by universities in America and around the globe.

As I said, every one of us in this room—I haven’t found an exception yet, and I have looked, but I expect every Senator has a home State university that doesn’t just know this to be true, but it teaches it in its curriculum. But Hack Two sees no evil. He knows nothing.

Wehrum’s disregard for well-established science provides a grim preview

of what we can expect from him if confirmed. His predictable dodging falls in lockstep with Administrator Pruitt, who has stated he does “not agree that [carbon dioxide] is a primary contributor to the global warming that we see.” That puts him in a very small circle of people, every one of whom I think is connected by money to the fossil fuel industry.

I asked Mr. Wehrum what he believes is a healthy standard for ozone. Now, bear in mind that one of the goals of the Clean Air Act is to set national ambient air quality standards for ozone, that the office to which he is nominated oversees this ozone standard, and that the EPA has had ozone standards in place since 1971, more than 45 years.

In response to my question, Wehrum answered: “I am not familiar with the current science on the health effects of ozone, so I cannot comment on your question as to the appropriate level of the standard.” Really?

I asked Wehrum whether he agreed with EPA’s 2009 finding that the current and projected concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere threaten the public health and welfare of current and future generations. I asked if he would commit not to narrow or weaken the EPA’s endangerment finding. Wehrum wrote back that he had not read the endangerment finding or the record prepared in support of the finding; therefore, he said: “I currently do not have a view.” I currently do not have a view? That is funny.

I bet he had a view when he was being paid by the Rubber Manufacturers Association, the American Forest & Paper Association, and the American Petroleum Institute. I guess it was the miraculous, evaporating view.

Maybe these “see no evil” nominees, Dourson and Wehrum, don’t know the basics of the problems they would confront. Maybe they just don’t know, but let’s not be fooled here. Polluters have paid these nominees well for their services over the years. They were expert enough to be hired by industry groups as lobbyists and consultants. We know where their allegiances lie. We know who has been paying them. We know whom they will serve.

A preview of coming attractions, coming up before the EPW soon is Andrew Wheeler, Trump’s nominee for the EPA’s second in command. Wheeler was a top lobbyist for the coal mining behemoth, Murray Energy. Not only did this company support Trump’s campaign and provide \$300,000 to help pay for his inauguration, Murray Energy has also donated to Pruitt-affiliated political action committees to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars. I can’t wait to hear his answers on the role of coal in climate change, childhood asthma, and mercury poisoning.

The sad part of all of this is, the polluting interests that own these nominees also throw their weight around in

Congress. So good luck getting an honest look at this mess through congressional oversight.

Over and over, appalling nominees get through confirmation with no Republican dissent, more “see no evil.” It is just wrong.

For now, the American public will pay the price of dismantling these regulatory safeguards. They will pay the price in poisonings and carcinogenic exposures, in rising seas and raging wildfires, in childhood asthma and northbound tropical diseases. Mark my words, one day there will be a reckoning for all of this.

When captured EPA officials put payback to their donors first and clean air and public health a way distant second, it stinks. It is crooked by any reasonable definition of the term. It is corrupt in exactly the way the Founding Fathers understood corruption.

The fossil fuel industry will one day be held to account for this binge of corruption and manipulation. ExxonMobil, Koch Industries, Arch Coal, Murray Coal, Peabody Coal, you own this just as the Republican Party does.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I come to the floor this afternoon to talk about the Healthcare Tax Relief Act, legislation I introduced to delay the health insurance tax that was created by the Affordable Care Act.

This tax is often referred to as the HIT tax. The HIT tax imposes fees on health insurance coverage to consumers. It is a pretty simple business concept that this HIT tax results in. If a fee increases on an insurance policy and the fee goes up—there is a fee charged to the company that issues this insurance policy—then that fee gets passed on to the consumer. It is the consumer, then, who pays the fee in the form of higher health insurance costs.

As is the case with most excise taxes, whether it is an excise tax on food or beverage or any other item of personal good, if this health insurance tax takes effect, costs will be passed on to consumers directly in the form of higher premiums. That is confirmed by the Congressional Budget Office.

This is one of the cost drivers that was built into the Affordable Care Act. This health insurance tax would directly increase the premiums of the consumer’s insurance product. This tax was supposed to begin a few years back in 2014. It was going to start at \$8 billion, and by 2018 the tax would reach \$14.3 billion. However, Congress recognized that this tax was going to have a significant impact on the price of coverage and, as a result, suspended the tax from taking effect in 2017. Without congressional action to delay or stop or prevent this ObamaCare tax from taking place again, this tax will take effect in 2018.

According to nonpartisan actuarial analysis conducted by Oliver Wyman,

an estimated 157 million Americans will be affected by this massive tax. Even more middle-income earners across this country, 157 million Americans and working Americans, are expected to shoulder the weight of this tax.

Oliver Wyman estimated that premiums will rise by 3 percent in each year; 2018, 2019, and 2020. That is 3 percent each year. That is 9 percent over 3 years.

To put this in simple perspective, in Colorado alone, premiums in the individual market rose by 34 percent from plan year 2017 to plan year 2018. Adding an additional 3 percent every year for those 3 years would leave those on the individual market paying nearly 43.3 percent, on average, more year to year if combined with the 2018 increases at the end of that 3-year, 9-percent increase run.

What is more, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, the average individual market premiums have increased by 105 percent from 2013 to 2017. Think about that. When the Affordable Care Act passed, when ObamaCare was passed, a promise was made that the average family would see a decrease in their healthcare costs of \$2,500 per family, but, instead, from 2013 to 2017, they saw a 105-percent increase in costs. If the health insurance tax takes effect, as planned by ObamaCare, then we would see another 9-percent increase over the next several years on top of that.

Without congressional action to delay this tax, estimates show that costs will rise between \$200 and \$300 annually for individuals and \$500 annually for families. That is a \$200 to \$300 increase for individuals and a \$500 increase annually for families.

To put that into some perspective, 25 percent of Americans don't have access—emergency access—to \$100. In an emergency, 25 percent of Americans don't have immediate access to \$100. Yet here we are talking about a mandated law—you have to have insurance coverage under the Affordable Care Act—but this law would then increase costs \$200 to \$300 on an individual and \$500 annually for families.

Statistics from the Federal Reserve show how much of a hardship this would create. The Federal Reserve found that 46 percent of Americans did not have enough money to cover a \$400 emergency expense. Yet the ObamaCare HIT tax would increase family insurance costs by \$500. Forty-six percent of Americans don't have access to \$400 in an emergency. Yet the ObamaCare HIT tax would increase it by \$500.

This tax has the potential to push over half of Americans into financial ruin, and it would be negligent for Congress to allow this tax to take effect. The financial threat this tax imposes on hard-working families is a far cry from that bold promise that was made to reduce costs by \$2,500 per family—one of the biggest Pinocchios, so to

speak, of the Affordable Care Act. At a time when we know that almost half of Americans could not shoulder a \$400 emergency expense, it would simply be irresponsible to allow this ObamaCare HIT tax to take effect.

Furthermore, the impacts of this tax touch our seniors who have earned their benefits as well. For seniors enrolled in Medicare Advantage plans—and Medicare Advantage is one of the most popular aspects of Medicare—premiums are expected to rise by roughly \$370 a year per enrollee if Congress doesn't find a resolution. In many cases, these are fixed-income individuals who would see their premiums increase \$370 a year because of the ObamaCare HIT tax.

In addition, seniors enrolled in Medicare Part D prescription drug plans can expect their premiums to increase as well. Hit them on their Medicare plans and hit them on the prescription drug plans—higher costs due to this ObamaCare HIT tax.

Even more, the impacts of the health insurance tax have large-scale consequences in the workplace as well. A study by the National Federation of Independent Business found that allowing the HIT tax to take effect could result in job losses for as many as 283,000 people by 2023. This tax could have the impact of costing 286,000 jobs by 2023. Research and analysis from our most respected actuaries continue to validate the negative consequences of the health insurance tax.

On behalf of all hard-working Americans, I call upon my colleagues in the Senate to join me in cosponsoring this commonsense piece of legislation, the Healthcare Tax Relief Act. Healthcare plans are being finalized right now for the 2018 rate year, and it is urgent for Congress to take action so that consumers are not saddled with yet one more cost that they can't afford.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

RECOGNIZING THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN'S BICENTENNIAL

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the bicentennial of the University of Michigan. The university has adopted the motto "Always Leading, Forever Valiant" for its bicentennial year—a motto that captures its 200 years at the forefront of American academic excellence.

The genesis of the University of Michigan predates the founding of my home State of Michigan.

On August 26, 1817, Lewis Cass, Governor of the Michigan territory, enacted a charter to create the University of Michigania, aligned with territory judge Augustus Woodward's envisioned System of Universal Science.

In 1852, the university's first president, Henry Philip Tappan, pioneered a model of higher education in which scholars do not settle for existing knowledge but actively pursue new knowledge through rigorous science. This approach solidified the univer-

sity's enduring legacy as a center for scientific research and discovery.

The university has paved the way for future innovation with many firsts throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. It was the first university with a chemical laboratory, the first to own and operate a hospital, the first to teach aeronautical engineering, the first public university with dental and pharmacy schools, and the first with a program in human genetics. Perhaps the most game-changing first—it was the first large State university to open its doors to both men and women.

Today, faculty and students continue to reach new firsts by answering important research questions that will affect future generations. Take, for instance, how the university has laid the groundwork for breakthroughs in American mobility.

In 2015, Mcity, a public-private partnership led by the University of Michigan, became the world's first controlled environment designed to test connected and automated vehicle technologies. The 32-acre simulated urban and suburban landscape is designed to support rigorous, repeatable testing of self-driving car technologies before they are tested on public roads and highways. This hub of innovation reflects our State's legacy as the heart of the American auto industry and will help lead our country into the next era of transportation.

A similar nexus between our past and future is true across nearly every discipline that U of M's research touches—engineering, medicine, social sciences, humanities, and more. Students and faculty are developing new cancer treatments, creating energy-efficient batteries, engaging in cutting-edge environmental science to protect the Great Lakes, and building prototypes of engines to take us to Mars. That is just to name a few.

Tied with the University of Michigan's drive to pursue knowledge is its drive to put that knowledge into action for the greater good. At its core, the university's mission is to serve society. This has been demonstrated by its history of activism and civic engagement.

The university commemorates one such event that occurred on October 14, 1960. Senator John F. Kennedy, whose former desk is just a few feet in front of me here today, delivered an unplanned speech on the steps of the Michigan Union at 2 a.m. He challenged University of Michigan students to work abroad in developing nations in an effort to promote peace. These remarks laid the blueprint for the U.S. Peace Corps, which was established in 1961.

The University of Michigan continues to have a truly global reach. It provides a world-class education to a diverse student body of 63,000 students on its Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and Flint campuses, educating in-state, out-of-state, and international students alike. They are drawn to the university's unfaltering endeavor to expand our