

and over. I don't think this gets better because I think the political pressure will be there just to keep doing this and slowing things down for everybody.

So we put a rule out there. It has gone through the Rules Committee. I have encouraged my Democratic colleagues to join in with this because there will be a Democratic President someday in the future, and they will not want this coming back at them and will say this is unfair, and I will agree. But it will happen, so let's fix it now. Let's resolve this in this Senate in this time from here on out—not a short-term rule but long-term, permanent—to take us back to this being the norm, when we could work better together.

I love hearing everyone say that we should be more bipartisan as a body. I would love to get this body working again. That is this proposal. This proposal is not a partisan proposal. It is not trying to get leverage on anybody. It is trying to get this body back to working again, and I hope in the weeks ahead, when this rule actually comes to the floor of the Senate, we can get overwhelming bipartisan support for it so that we can get back to working together.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

NOMINATION OF ANDREW R. WHEELER

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about a vote that we will be having in just a few minutes on the process of moving Andrew Wheeler forward as the EPA Administrator.

This is not a time for talk; it is not time for theoretical debates. This is certainly not the time for an EPA Administrator who, during his time at the EPA, has ignored climate scientists, rolled back climate regulations, and taken action that will lead to more carbon pollution.

Instead, this is a time for bold, decisive action. We need to act today because life on our planet depends on it. The fate of our Nation depends on it. Our children's and grandchildren's futures depend on it.

For those reasons, I cannot support Andrew Wheeler for the critical position of EPA Administrator.

Climate change is real. In fact, it is more than real. It is an existential crisis, and it is already having real impact on Michigan families and Michigan's economy.

Some call it global warming. Katharine Hayhoe, a climate scientist from Texas Tech, has a better term. She calls it "global weirding." Ask anybody in Michigan. Things have been weird.

Our lakes are heating up. In fact, Lake Superior is getting about 2 degrees warmer each decade. That could make the lake a happy home for invasive species, like sea lamprey.

As the waters warm, these parasites grow and kill off more trout and salmon and other fish that are key to the Great Lakes' \$8 billion recreational

fishing industry. It is believed that warmer temperatures contributed to algal blooms on the lake last summer.

Other changes we are seeing are life-threatening.

Thanks to the polar vortex in January, Michigan experienced temperatures colder than Antarctica. Scientists believe that climate change has caused the jet stream to become wobbly—that is a technical term, "wobbly"—pushing dangerously frigid air south.

Folks say: Well, how can it be global warming when we see the polar vortex? It is about what is happening to destabilize the atmosphere and the planet and the changes that are occurring.

Last weekend, a bomb cyclone hit my State, leaving tens of thousands of Michigan residents without power.

We are having to come up with new terms. I had never heard of a bomb cyclone—60-mile-an-hour winds, ripping up homes and farms and roadways.

The intensity of what is happening is incredible. The travel was so treacherous in Otsego County that all roads were closed—all of the roads were closed. Even drivers on Interstate 75 were getting stuck in drifts. That is our major highway.

We can't link any specific storm to climate change. However, we do know that overall climate change is making storms more intense. They are longer. They are more intense. They are happening more frequently with more intensity.

Last summer in Houghton County, more than 5½ inches of rain fell in 6 hours. It caused at least \$100 million in damage to infrastructure, and a 12-year-old-boy died when the basement of his home collapsed.

Our climate is changing, but you don't have to take my word for it. Just ask insurance company executives. Their companies paid out a record \$135 billion—billion dollars—from natural disasters in 2017 alone. That is almost three times as much as the historic annual average, and their projections show it getting worse.

We need to take action on climate change. While it is not widely recognized, I want to speak about something positive that we have done, and that was last year's farm bill.

As you know, the farm bill passed the Senate with a vote of 87 to 13—the most votes in history. While the bill was historic for a number of reasons, one of those is that it includes the most ambitious Federal climate-smart agricultural and forestry policies to date, working with farmers and ranchers as partners.

It helps farmers implement climate-smart policies by revamping USDA conservation programs to prioritize investments in soil carbon sequestration, incentivizing the planting of cover crops, and expanding USDA support for farmer participation in carbon markets.

It also invests in the Rural Energy for America Program, which helps

farmers and rural small businesses install renewable energy systems and creates a joint USDA-Department of Energy education grant program to drive carbon capture projects across rural America.

We must also protect forests and farmland, which serve as vital carbon sinks that hold carbon rather than releasing it and making the destabilization even worse.

The farm bill amends the popular Healthy Forests Reserve Program to prioritize carbon sequestration practices programs and discourage the development of forestland. It authorizes new programs to restore national forest landscapes, protect carbon-rich, old-growth trees, and prevent uncharacteristic wildfires and their emissions. It establishes a landmark soil health demonstration trial to keep carbon in the ground and promote healthy and productive farmland.

I am proud of what we did. It was done with the partnership of farmers and ranchers, and I have to say that our farmers understand the importance of protecting our land—their land—air, and water, I think, as much as, if not more than anyone else. No one's business is more impacted by severe and erratic weather than our farmers. They are caught right in the middle of it, and I appreciate their working with us to be part of the solution.

I am also working with my colleagues on policies to ensure that the United States, not China, is the global leader on advanced transportation technologies like electric and hydrogen vehicles.

Meanwhile, Andrew Wheeler and the Trump administration are upending fuel economy and carbon regulations in a way that hurts the auto industry, consumers, and our environment. We need to invest more in renewable energy and the research that is making it more affordable all the time.

Electric utilities in Michigan have committed to dramatically increase renewable electricity, reduce carbon emissions by 80 percent, and stop burning coal.

Meanwhile, Andrew Wheeler and the Trump administration have rolled back the historic Clean Power Plan.

I am proud of the fact that Michigan utilities are moving forward anyway because they know it is the right thing and they know what is at stake. But this administration—Andrew Wheeler—has rolled back the historic Clean Power Plan, the Nation's first regulation of greenhouse gases from the power sector.

We need to be laser-focused on climate change and the existential threat it represents. Meanwhile, Andrew Wheeler and the Trump administration are doing their best to pretend that climate change is no big deal. That is even as the Pentagon recently concluded that two-thirds of critical military installations are threatened—two-thirds of critical military installations are threatened—by climate change.

Climate change is a big deal, and it is time to do something about it that is real—not play political games, but to actually do something thoughtful and real about it.

In the wise words of Hank Williams, Jr., “We need a little less talk and a lot more action.” Andrew Wheeler has repeatedly shown no interest in acting. In fact, he wants to take us backward—and is taking us backward—on climate change. He has no interest in reducing, let alone eliminating, carbon pollution. We need to act, and it is clear that Andrew Wheeler is the wrong person to lead the EPA at this critical time for our country.

I urge a “no” vote on Andrew Wheeler for EPA Administrator.

NOMINATION OF NEOMI RAO

Mr. President, one other brief comment, as some colleagues will be coming to the floor in a bit, and I want to join them in speaking about the DC Circuit Court nominee Neomi Rao. I stand with them in opposing this nomination.

In the era of #MeToo, when women are sharing their stories about assault and abuse, we don’t need a judge who has written that women who drink are to blame if they are then sexually assaulted.

We do not need a judge who blocked a critical equal pay measure intended to help close the wage gap.

So I join with colleagues in encouraging, at the appropriate time, a “no” vote on this nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that both Senator MENENDEZ and I be permitted to speak for up to 5 minutes each prior to the roll call vote on the Desmond nomination.

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

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I am delighted to join the Senator from Michigan today, to add to her comments about the replacement for now-Justice Kavanaugh after he was confirmed to the Supreme Court last year, and I want to remind my colleagues about the people who spoke up during Justice Kavanaugh’s nomination and the critical issues that they spoke about.

Women stood up. They rallied. They marched. They made clear they do not want to go back to the days before the Roe v. Wade decision affirmed their right to make their own healthcare decisions.

Incredibly brave survivors, such as Dr. Ford and so many others, said they wanted to be heard and believed, not silenced.

Families across the country said they wanted a Justice who would interpret the law fairly and objectively, without partisanship—someone whose priority is the Constitution and people across the country, not President Trump and his extreme agenda.

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, it is clear that President Trump and Republicans in Congress aren’t listening to women or survivors or families, because the next nominee for the DC Circuit Court fails on each and every count I just listed.

As we speak, Neomi Rao is enacting the Trump agenda in her role as the head of the Agency that reviews and approves the Trump administration’s changes to regulations impacting so many people in communities who stood up to oppose Justice Kavanaugh’s nomination.

Under Ms. Rao’s leadership, the Trump administration finalized a rule that prevents healthcare providers from even informing patients who come to title X-funded health centers about where to go to get safe—safe—legal abortions and places new, burdensome, medically unnecessary requirements on title X-funded health centers, designed specifically to prevent Planned Parenthood from receiving these funds, meaning millions of patients may lose a source of quality, affordable, basic healthcare they trust.

Ms. Rao has helped put forward rules that would make it harder for members of the LGBTQ community and women to get the care they need by allowing providers to turn them away simply because of who they are or because they want birth control.

I also want to take a few minutes to address Ms. Rao’s deeply concerning comments about rape and sexual assault. While in college, she wrote that “a good way to avoid a potential date rape is to stay reasonably sober.”

Let’s be clear. It is never a survivor’s fault, ever, that someone raped or sexually assaulted them.

Ms. Rao was given an opportunity to explicitly reject those comments and failed to do so. She then sent a letter attempting to walk them back, but her actions speak louder than a letter sent during a nomination process, and her actions on this issue have been harmful.

In her role within the Trump administration, Ms. Rao has helped Secretary DeVos to roll back protections that help survivors get justice when they are sexually assaulted on campuses. In other words, at the same time that Ms. Rao claims her views have changed on sexual assault and consent, her actions are aligned with those who believe what she wrote in college. To the survivors I hear from and those who bravely spoke out against Justice Kavanaugh and so many others, Ms. Rao’s actions are what matters.

Ms. Rao is also listening to corporate lobbyists instead of scientists when it comes to climate and our public health and is advancing rules that would allow more discrimination in our Nation’s housing programs. Unfortunately, it seems that on many issues, where President Trump wants to do damage and hurt families, Ms. Rao is right behind him with a rubberstamp, just like Justice Kavanaugh and so

many others President Trump has nominated to the bench.

We need judges who will do what workers and families expect of a judge—to interpret our laws according to the Constitution and what is best for our country, not according to politics and what is best for President Trump. That is why I am strongly opposing her nomination, and I hope all of our colleagues will join us in doing so.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

NOMINATION OF MICHAEL J. DESMOND

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise today in opposition to President Trump’s nominee for Chief Counsel of the Internal Revenue Service, Michael Desmond.

This nominee comes before us just a week into this year’s filing season, when our need for an IRS that treats all taxpayers fairly is clearer than ever.

Already, thousands of taxpayers across America are grappling with the fallout of the Trump tax bill and its capping of the State and local tax, or SALT, deduction. Already, the IRS has reported an average 17 percent drop in the size of tax refunds this year. Already, the broken promises made by President Trump and his Republican allies are being laid bare.

They promised middle-class families thousands of dollars of tax relief and a \$4,000 raise in their salaries. Instead, they got \$1.5 trillion in more debt and an economy that is even more rigged for big corporations and wealthy CEOs.

As bad as the Trump tax scam is for the whole country, it is worse for New Jersey families. That is because Republicans paid for a big chunk of their corporate giveaways by gutting the State and local tax deduction that New Jersey and other States’ middle-class families depend on to write off their property taxes. In 2016, 1.8 million people—about 40 percent of New Jersey taxpayers—deducted their property and State income taxes. More than 80 percent of them earned less than \$200,000, and the average deduction totaled \$18,000—far above the arbitrary cap imposed by the Trump tax bill.

With tax season under way, many homeowners are just now realizing how badly their President ripped them off. To add insult to injury, the IRS issued haphazard guidance for the Trump tax bill that unfairly targets States like New Jersey, trying to simply lessen the burden heaped on them by the GOP.

In the final days of 2017, just days after President Trump signed the tax bill, New Jerseyans rushed to prepay their 2018 local property taxes and preserve their deductions before the new cap on the SALT deductions took effect. But then came Trump’s IRS, which issued guidance to try to limit their ability to deduct property tax payments made in 2017 on their Federal returns—a stunning backdoor attempt to retroactively apply the cap on property tax deductions without cleared legislative tax to warrant doing so.