

ORDERS FOR TUESDAY,
SEPTEMBER 17, 2019

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 10 a.m., Tuesday, September 17; further, that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, morning business be closed, and the Senate proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the Rakolta nomination under the previous order; finally, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate recess following the cloture vote on the Howery nomination until 2:15 p.m. to allow for weekly conference meetings.

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

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it stand adjourned under the previous order, following the remarks of Senator WHITEHOUSE.

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

The Senator from Rhode Island is recognized.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I am here today on the Senate floor for “Time to Wake Up” speech No. 253.

If you felt like the heat this summer was particularly brutal, you were not imagining things. July was the hottest month ever recorded, according to NOAA. The Secretary General of the World Meteorological Organization noted, “July has rewritten climate history, with dozens of new temperature records at [the] local, national and global level.”

NOAA says 2019 is on track to tie for the second hottest year on record. Overall, the past 5 years are expected to take the title of the hottest 5-year period in recorded human history.

This rapid heating of our Earth is wreaking havoc on our environment and public health. Here is a list from NOAA that you can find on their website, Selected Significant Climate Anomalies and Events, July 2019, all around the globe.

In 1 day—1 day—the Greenland ice sheet lost 12½ billion tons of ice, melted into the sea. Throughout the world, from France to India, to the Arctic Circle, temperature records shattered. On July 4, the people of Anchorage, AK, experienced their first ever 90-degree day. At one point in July, excessive heat warnings asked nearly 170 million Americans to avoid the outdoors and take shelter in air conditioning, where available.

According to Deke Arndt, head of climate monitoring for NOAA, these

record heat waves are, and I quote him, “almost entirely due to climate change.” Jack Williams, a professor with the Center for Climatic Research at the University of Wisconsin, told NBC news the “[h]eat waves of today are going to be the normal events of tomorrow.”

Where there is heat, there is apt to be fire. In the United States, wildfires rage on a remarkable scale. According to a new report by the major data analytics company CoreLogic, over 8.7 million acres burned in the United States in 2018. That is about the land area of the 75 largest cities in the United States combined.

This summer, the Arctic experienced a record-setting wildfire season. Places that have not traditionally burned in parts of northern Canada, Alaska, Greenland, and Siberia were engulfed in flames visible from space.

In this map, the North Pole is about here. This looks down at Alaska here and Russia here, the Siberian Arctic. As you can see, fires were everywhere. Guillermo Rein of Imperial College London told Wired:

Arctic fires are rare, but they’re not unprecedented. What is unprecedented is the number of fires that are happening. Never before have satellites around the planet seen this level of activity.

As of August 28, fires cut across more than 6 million acres of Siberian forest and 2.5 million acres of Alaskan tundra and forested land.

These forests aren’t just scarring the Arctic landscape; they are also releasing tons more of carbon dioxide, causing more climate change. Researchers estimate the Arctic fires have released more than 180 million tons of CO₂. For comparison, my home State of Rhode Island was responsible for around 9.75 million tons of carbon dioxide through our fossil fuel combustion in 2016—roughly 20 times as much, just from these fires.

NASA scientists are also tracing soot from these fires. The soot absorbs sunlight and warms the atmosphere; and when the soot settles and covers Arctic ice, it absorbs more sunlight and speeds up the melting and the warming. Once these forces are set in motion, the vicious cycle of warmer temperatures, wildfires, ice melt, and then ever warmer temperature is hard to break.

Far from the Arctic, fires rage in another iconic ecosystem: the Amazon. So far this year, the Amazon region has seen over 40,000 fires. Unlike the Arctic, our changing climate is less to blame for the devastation than humans.

Again, natural forest fires in the Amazon are rare, but warmer and drier conditions under climate change do make the fires larger and longer lasting than in the past. The true culprit in Brazil is manmade deforestation, accelerating under the new Brazilian President. Enforcement against illegal logging and clearing has declined. In the first 6 months of this year, over

1,300 square miles of Amazon forest were destroyed in Brazil, sometimes at a rate of more than three football fields’ worth of forest per minute.

The journal *Science Advances* warns that deforestation in the Amazon is close to a threshold beyond which the rainforest will undergo irreversible changes. Without the healthy forests of the Amazon, the world will lose one of its most important terrestrial carbon sinks—areas that naturally absorb carbon from our atmosphere. The Amazon captures about 5 percent of annual global carbon dioxide emissions. A 2015 study published in *Nature* shows that the amount of carbon dioxide the Amazon absorbs is already falling, has fallen since the 1990s by nearly one-third.

In Brazil, the air has gotten so thick with smoke that in Porto Velho, a city in the upper Amazon basin, over 400 children landed in a local hospital with respiratory problems in the first 3 weeks of August. Public health officials and resources are overwhelmed. A pediatrician in Porto Velho said: “Every year we have some fires and issues with smoke, but this was the worst year of them all.”

The tragedy in Brazil is reminiscent of forests burned in Southeast Asia to make way for palm oil plantations. Sumatra, Borneo, and parts of Malaysia saw over 70 percent of their peat forest lost to manmade deforestation. In Indonesia, nearly 106,000 acres burned in just the first 5 months of this year.

I am from the Ocean State. Wildfires, of course, don’t burn in the ocean, but unprecedented heat waves are surging through our seas, laying waste to coral reefs in much the way wildfires ravage forests. The harm to the Amazon rainforests and to the Arctic steppes from wildfire finds an aquatic echo in the death of the Great Barrier Reef and reefs all over the world from climate-driven, unprecedented ocean heat waves.

Our willful blindness to these obvious calamities playing out on God’s Earth, which are largely due to malign influence from the fossil fuel industry and its great armada of front groups it uses to do its dirty business, needs to stop. The willful blindness has to come to an end. From the Equator to the Arctic, an Earth aflame will have life-or-death consequences for generations to come.

Even our news media are turning their collective backs. In late August, as these fires raged, *Media Matters* chronicled that not one—not one—of the five influential Sunday news shows covered them. They are basically political gossip shows. Indeed, *Media Matters* showed cable news devoted to wildfires in the Amazon only 7 percent of the time they devoted to the Notre Dame Cathedral fire. In other speeches, I pointed out how the royal baby has swamped climate coverage in our pathetic media.

Whether in Indonesia or Brazilian rain forests or Arctic tundra, the costs of the corporate greed and paid-for political ignorance that are stopping us

from acting are on full display. Our planet suffers as a consequence. We avert our eyes in the pursuit of cheap fossil fuel. But nothing comes without a cost, and our debt is coming due. Pope Francis drove home this point in a recent Sunday address, saying: “We have caused a climate emergency that

gravely threatens nature and life itself, including our own.”

Our world is on fire. I am sorry to quarrel with Billy Joel, but this time, we did start the fire. If that can’t get the attention of my colleagues in Congress, I do not know what can.

We must wake up.
I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 10 A.M.
TOMORROW

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is adjourned until 10 a.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 6:22 p.m., adjourned until Tuesday, September 17, 2019, at 10 a.m.