

and your kids likely will because it is an important part of the oceanic food web. Crash the pteropod, and a lot of other species fall.

A trawl survey a few years ago off the Pacific Northwest found that most of the pteropod caught in the trawl survey showed what the scientists called severe shell damage—severe shell damage. Pteropods don't survive well in acidified oceans. That much severe shell damage in a foundational species is a bad harbinger of things to come, and it is just one of many harms from fossil fuel emissions acidifying the world's oceans.

Then we get to the other petrochemical problem, plastics. The ocean is awash with marine plastic waste. Unlike natural substances that biodegrade into basic elements that return into the cycle of life that other beings can consume, plastics are man-made. Unlike natural substances, they break down eventually into microplastic and even nanoplastic particles that have no use to anything.

Ocean plastic waste is a menace. Large ocean plastic waste ends up in the bellies of whales, indigestibly, killing them. Ghost gear made of plastic goes about its lethal business with no fisherman ever retrieving the catch, just killing, killing, killing.

Pretty much every sea bird consumes plastic, lodging in its belly, starving its young of real food. You can walk midway island and see the cadavers of dead young birds with stomachs full of indigestible plastic unwittingly fed to them by their parents.

Small creatures consume tiny plastic particles. Bigger creatures consume the small creatures. We consume the bigger creatures. And now we find plastic particles in mothers' breast milk, in human brain tissue samples, even in rain drops over Colorado. Unless we change direction, there will soon be more plastic by weight in the world's oceans than the weight of living fish in the world's oceans.

The plastics and fossil fuel industry may chortle about their profits, but none of this is good for humans. These industries are damaging the natural systems of the planet, the natural systems to which we have adapted as a species, the natural systems that make Earth so beautifully and abundantly livable. And there comes a reckoning. As Pope Francis said, you slap Mother Nature, she will slap you back.

Regrettably, the plastics and fossil fuel industries are also damaging the political systems of the planet, corrupting government so as to disable our ability to remedy their pollution. The question of the moment that people should be asking is why are so many politicians lying to us about climate change? The answer, of course, is money. Fossil fuel money floods our political system, pours into it, much of it secretly.

Politicians, whose home State universities teach about climate change, lie about climate change. How is that

possible? It is not like there is some unfathomable mystery about how climate change works that eludes human understanding. No, it is known. There is a counterforce at work against knowledge. Fossil fuel money and political pressure is that counterforce.

That force—that malign, corrupt, political operation of the fossil fuel industry—has now become dangerous. If you delay treatment of a disease, things get worse and a treatable disease can become lethal. If you delay dealing with termites in your house, things get worse, and it is no longer a repair but a teardown.

The fossil fuel political operation, for very selfish reasons, has delayed the remedies that would have given us a broad pathway to climate safety, and it is now getting dangerous.

The control of our government by this political operation is right now complete. Neither House of Congress will do anything right now to avert the looming danger. After asking for \$1 billion from the fossil fuel industry and getting massive donations, our madman President says there is no danger—a supposedly educated man calling our climate perils a “hoax.”

His executive officials are all in tow to the fossil fuel industry, doing exactly as they are told—puppets on a fossil fuel string. They even put Justices on the Supreme Court to ignore the facts about climate danger.

Here is their problem, which is our problem as well: Politics responds to money, but nature, she can't be bought. She couldn't care less. Nature will keep administering the consequences dictated by natural laws, by laws of physics and chemistry, and biology.

I flew home from the Our Ocean Conference, thanks to our understanding of those natural laws when you honor those laws, aerodynamics and metallurgy, and make flying from Seoul, Korea, to Dulles airport outside Washington, DC, possible. Dishonoring those laws is foolhardy and dangerous. Dishonoring those laws for money is reprehensible and dangerous.

A corrupted U.S. Government, a polluted planet, and trillions—literally trillions—of dollars in economic harm is headed our way fast, well and completely predicted, all from the bad behavior of a greedy and amoral industry that knows no bounds—not of decency, not of honesty, and certainly, not of protection for our planet. If taking that fight on is not a fight worth having, I don't know what is.

I yield the floor.

ADDRESSING THE HOMEWORK GAP THROUGH THE E-RATE PROGRAM

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I rise this evening in strong opposition to S.J. Res. 7, the Congressional Review Act resolution that would repeal the Federal Communications Commission's commonsense rule allowing schools and libraries to use E-Rate funds—“E-

Rate” stands for “Education Rate funds”—to ensure that there is access to the educational tools of a school or a library to every child in America, and that would occur by extending out the way in which we view this program so that Wi-Fi hotspots can be provided to students and to educators so that they can use them even when they are not in the school, even when they are not in the library.

If we pass this resolution—the resolution which the Republicans are malevolently bringing out onto the floor—we are not simply undoing a regulation; we are pulling the plug on progress in our country; we are abandoning millions of students who lack the internet access needed to complete their homework, to attend class, to reach their full potential.

This repeal will widen educational disparities in our country, it will deepen the digital divide, and it will slam shut the doors of opportunity for millions of children in our country.

We should be doing everything in our power to close the homework gap that exists between rich and poor in our Nation, not reopen it, not make that homework gap even larger, making it more difficult for poor kids to get access to these educational tools they need. In this modern era, that absolutely meets the definition of a Wi-Fi hotspot. That is the society of 2025. You have to move to that era.

That homework gap is the cruel chasm that separates students who have reliable internet access at home from those who don't. It is a gap that existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic, but it was laid bare when schools closed and kids were forced to learn from kitchen tables and living rooms. For some, the transition was difficult; for others, it was impossible. For too many children, especially in low-income, rural, and Black and Brown communities, they were locked out of virtual learning because, simply, they lacked a basic internet connection.

You didn't have to worry about the families that had a good income. Those kids had internet at home when their schools were shut down during COVID. But you had to create some kind of a solution for kids who didn't have that at home.

We saw the stories of the students sitting in parking lots outside fast-food restaurants just to pick up a Wi-Fi signal strong enough to complete their assignments. We saw families choosing between paying rent and paying for broadband. We saw the urgent, indisputable need for action.

In that moment of need, Congress stepped up. We passed, at my request, \$7 billion to help provide hotspots and other connectivity tools to students and educators. Demand was overwhelming in our Nation. We had a COVID shutdown. Schools were closed, and there was going to be a huge digital divide which would open up because kids in the suburbs, for the most

part, had access, but kids who were poorer—and, disproportionately, they were Black and Brown—in our Nation did not. And we are still reeling from the effect that period of time had upon young people in our Nation.

The program, as it was implemented, however, helped nearly 18 million students at 10,000 schools and libraries connect to the internet. I am very proud of that. It was a big difference in the lives of those kids. But that funding ran out, leaving millions of students across the country at risk of falling back into the digital divide.

That is why, last year, the Federal Communications Commission took steps to extend the reach of the E-Rate Program—a program that I was proud to author in 1996 in the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

If I can take you back to that period of time, not one home in America had broadband. We still lived in an analog world, not a digital world. We lived in a world of dial-up internet technology. Broadband had not been deployed.

So the legislation, which I am proud to have been the House author of, along with Senators—what we did was we broke down every monopoly that existed. The telephone monopolies, the cable monopolies—they all were eliminated. Telephone companies could do what cable companies do. Cable companies could do what telephone companies do. All of a sudden, Comcast can offer phone service, and Verizon and AT&T can offer cable service. So they need to deploy broadband in order to accommodate all this information.

We are going to move very rapidly into a digital era, into a broadband era, and it happened pretty much in the blink of an eye for about 80 percent of our country. We are still working on the final 10 percent of our Nation, but for the most part, it happened by the year 2000, 2001. It was done. People had it. Broadband was deployed.

But what we did was we said to ourselves: We have got to take care of the poorest kids in our country as we move rapidly on a technological revolution. Yes, the economy is going to be absolutely exploding. In fact, about \$1.5 trillion worth of private sector investment was put into that broadband expansion in just a 5-year period. It was incredible. It transformed our Nation.

A 14-year-old girl today thinks that she has an entitlement to a 65-inch screen in her living room and a little digital device on her lap at the same time. That didn't exist in the year 2000. It all happened in the blink of an eye.

Now, what would happen, though, to the kids that didn't come from suburban or wealthier families? So what I suggested was that we have a program, an education program, so that every time someone made a little phone call, there would be a little tax on it, and that tax would then create a fund. I called it the education fund, the Education Rate, and it ultimately just had a nickname called E-Rate. That is what helps to provide for internet serv-

ice in schools—in schools in Harlem or Roxbury, MA, inner city, Washington, DC. That is what helps to supplement that, to make it possible for every kid to have access to the internet.

That program works, and so far, it has spent about \$70 billion. It is still the largest educational technology program in the history of the United States—\$70 billion, very profitable. But times change, and we learn about what has to happen as we are changing the way in which our country operates and new technologies get developed.

So, yes, we had that revolution from the 1996 act. I am very proud of it. We called the companies that got created Google, eBay, Amazon, Hulu, YouTube. I am very proud of that. We wanted a Darwinian, paranoia-inducing revolution out in the marketplace. We would no longer be tied to this old telecommunications system that Alexander Graham Bell would have recognized. No. We were moving on to the future, but with it, we had to bring along the young people in our Nation, and I mean every young person had to have access to it in their school, at their desk. So it was ensured to make sure that the schools and libraries had the connectivity which they needed. That is essentially what the E-Rate Program is all about.

But as the technology evolved, so too did the nature of education in our Nation, and today, learning doesn't end when the school bell rings. Learning follows students home, and so should internet access for everybody—everybody.

The Federal Communications Commission's decision to allow schools and libraries to lend Wi-Fi hotspots was not a radical idea; it was a responsible idea. It recognized that in the 21st century, a student's ability to succeed should not depend on whether their parents can afford a broadband subscription. It helped ensure that millions of students that relied upon the Emergency Connectivity Fund during the pandemic wouldn't suddenly lose access to crucial connectivity at home.

In other words, the Federal Communications Commission learned from what happened during the pandemic, learned from what happened when I was able to move over the \$7 billion for these Wi-Fi hotspots to help kids at home get it, and they said: Well, do you know what we should do? We should just make sure that no student is left offline. We will make it a permanent program. And they passed that regulation.

You don't have to take my word for this. In study after study, it has been shown that students without access to broadband internet at home performed worse than their better educated, better connected classmates. It is not that these kids are smarter in the suburbs than the kids in the inner city. Those kids are just as smart. But you can't allow an education gap because the kids who have access are going to get a better education because they have ac-

cess to the technology by which young people in our Nation get their education in the 21st century. So you have to make sure everyone gets access to it; otherwise, without access to broadband internet at home, those kids are going to perform worse than their better connected classmates. It is not that their intelligence is less than the kids in the suburbs. It is not that they wouldn't study as hard. They would. It is just that they don't have access.

The Department of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress, for example, has repeatedly shown that high-performing students had much better access to the internet at home. I don't think you have to be Horace Mann—the founder of the public school system in the United States—to think that that makes sense. Of course it does.

In 2023, a study of Michigan students found that a student without access to home internet earned significantly lower grades—actually, 0.6 lower on the 4.0 scale—than their connected classmates. Not because they weren't as intelligent. Not because they wouldn't have learned equally well on their device. But you need the device. You need access. You need a Wi-Fi hotspot. You need internet at home. You need something that is going to help you to compete.

By the way, we have another word for those kids. We call them the future of the 21st century in the United States of America. Kids that are 20 percent of our population, they are 100 percent of our future. We are living in a digital world, and it is a portable skill set that every child should be able to take to anywhere they want to go in the world for the rest of their lives. It will be a skill set that employs them, educates them, makes them better citizens. But you can't reach that stage if you are denying it to them when they are 6 years old, 8 years old, 10 years old, 12 years old, and expect them to be able to compete with the kids that come from wealthier families. That is what this vote is all about. It is all about that one issue.

When I was a boy, I had my books. I could take them home. My father drove a truck for the Hood Milk company. I would take my books home. The school superintendent's kids would bring their books home. I could compete against them. Books are equal. That is not the world we live in anymore. If you don't have the internet at home, the other kids essentially have their books in their knapsack. It is called their iPad. They have their home computer. They have access.

I am only here because it was books and I could compete against any kid in Malden, MA, in a blue-collar community. That is why I am a Senator. I had never even been to Washington before I got elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. That was my first visit to Washington. I am 29, 30 years old, but I have been competing because you give me the books you give the kid

whose father is the school superintendent, and I will compete against him.

As a matter of fact, I actually sit here at the desk which Jimmy Stewart—"Mr. Smith Goes to Washington"—had in the movie "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington." He had never been to Washington. I had never been to Washington.

But it didn't mean you couldn't do a good job if you had access to the same tools that young people had in the best school systems in America. That is what this debate is all about. It is about ensuring that every child has access to the internet through a Wi-Fi hotspot if they need it.

If the school, the library, says we have got to help them at home, they don't have it—because that kid will fall behind the kids who have it. And it won't have anything to do with their ability, won't have anything to do with their desire to be a full participant in this great American experiment.

A study using Census Bureau data estimated that individuals with greater access to the computer and internet at home spent 28 percent more hours learning than those kids without that access. I mean, do we really need a study of this? Of course not. We know that is the truth.

So as this evidence on home connectivity piles up, there is no debate: Students without access to internet at home are seriously disadvantaged compared to their classmates, plain and simple.

I identified with this because my father was a truck driver. We didn't have trips to the Himalayas. We didn't have some kind of summer school at universities to help out my brothers and me when we were 15, 16, or 17. But we didn't feel deprived because we had the same books as the kids in the suburbs, in the private schools. We had the same books; and I am going to study as hard as I can.

Today, that is not possible. If you don't have a Wi-Fi hotspot, you can't do it. If you don't have internet at home, you can't do it. You might want to do it, but you can't do it. And by the way, they know they don't have it. They can see the kids on the other side of town who have it. They know it. They are 9; they are 10; they are 11; they are 12. They know it. That is what this program is all about. It is just to say: You have got it; you have got it at home. Go to it. Be whoever you can be.

These Republicans, they are going to vote this program out of existence. This is the great equalizer. This is the access to opportunity. This is democratization of access to opportunity through education, which is supposed to be the foundation of our country.

You know, when I grew up, I would look at Abe Lincoln and his story. I would look at the movies about Abe Lincoln. He would be reading books by candlelight in his house on the prairie. That is all you needed, was the light, because the book was there. You could do it.

Well, without a Wi-Fi hotspot, there is nothing to read. Your device is not working. You are denying that ambitious, hard-working, imaginative, creative young person—by the way, disproportionately Black and Brown in our Nation—from having the same opportunities that we have provided for 250 years since the dawn of our country.

So we are putting these young people at a serious disadvantage compared to their classmates. So now my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, they want to just take that tool away. They want to rip the hotspots out of students' hands. Why? Let's just listen to a few of their arguments.

First, the Congressional Review Act supporters say: The hotspots rule is illegal.

This is simply untrue. It is not illegal.

In section 254 of the Communications Act, Congress provided the FCC with flexibility to adapt the E-Rate program for changing times and educational conditions. How do I know? I am the author of that provision. So when people tell me it is illegal, it is not illegal. I wrote the provision which says the Federal Communications Commission can do this for the children of our Nation.

Second, the Congressional Review Act supporters argue that the hotspots rule endangers students by allowing them to access inappropriate content, including on social media.

False. That is also not true. Under the Children's Internet Protection Act, schools and libraries receiving E-Rate dollars must ensure that hotspots block or filter images that are obscene or harmful to minors.

By the way, with all the crocodile tears coming down from my colleagues on the other side about their concern for children, I have had a children's online privacy protection act pending here in the Senate for years that gives total privacy protection to children under the age of 17 in our Nation, and we can't get it passed.

Why can't we get it passed? Because too many Republicans are concerned about what the big social media companies might say to them.

Well, where is their concern, then, for the poor child being exposed? Not there. They should be more concerned about what Meta is doing to them, what Google is doing to them, what those big companies are doing—because, under the law, it can't happen under the E-Rate dollars. It can't happen. It is illegal. We need another law to pass that makes it illegal to let the big social media companies in our country do the same thing.

If my colleagues are really so concerned about children's online privacy and safety, I urge them to support my legislation—if they care about it—because that would block it.

Third, they say that the program is wasteful.

That is false. Again, the hotspots rule limits the amount of money that

can be requested by an E-Rate applicant and prohibits the duplication of the funding. It is all written into the law.

Let me be clear: This repeal will not save the taxpayer a dime. What does the resolution really do? It doesn't make our schools stronger. It doesn't make our libraries better. It doesn't improve student outcomes. It doesn't lower your taxes. It doesn't save the government money. All it does is strip away a lifeline for the children in our Nation who need it the most, that they can take it home with them, that they can study at home. That is it.

So this E-Rate expansion didn't just connect students; it connected futures. It helped make good on the promise that every child, regardless of their income, their race, their geography deserves a fair shot at learning, and that promise is worth defending. It is worth defending.

Education is a great equalizer. It is the foundation of our democracy, the engine of our economy, and the heartbeat of our shared American dream that any child, regardless of where they come from, regardless of who their mother and father is, can dream the great dreams. But we have to give them access to the tools they need in order to maximize all of their God-given abilities.

In today's world, to be cut off from the digital world is to be cut off from education. And that means that broadband is not a luxury; it is a necessity. It is an essential tool as much as a textbook or schoolbus or a lunch program. This is not a partisan issue. It is not a liberal issue. It is not a conservative issue. It is a children's issue. It is an American issue. It is who we should be. It is a fairness issue.

I urge my colleagues to not vote to deepen inequality. Instead, vote to affirm our values. Vote to defend every child's right to learn, to thrive, to reach for the stars. Let's reject this resolution and recommit ourselves to closing the homework gap so that all children have equal access to learning.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

MEASURE READ THE FIRST TIME—S. 1668

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I understand that there is a bill at the desk from Senator MERKLEY, and I ask for its first reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bill by title.

A bill (S. 1668), a bill to amend Chapter 131 title 5, United States Code, to prohibit the President, Vice President, Members of Congress, and individuals appointed to Senate-confirmed positions from issuing, sponsoring, endorsing certain financial instruments, and for other purposes.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I now ask for a second reading, and in order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to my own request.