

was theoretical; now Michiganders understand that extreme weather is real, it is here, they feel it in their pocketbooks. We have to mitigate it. We have to accept it, and we have to be ready to prepare ourselves when we have these crazy ice storms, these crazy once-in-a-generation tornadoes and move on and not exclude people because they don't want to talk about woke policies.

Safety and security, finally. Every Michigander has the right to live free from fear, to feel safe in their own home, and in the country they love. That is what got me into public service in the very beginning right after 9/11. Shootings in our schools and our businesses are a threat to our lives. Our government and our computers, our personal data shouldn't be hacked—neither should our cars or our homes.

And we should get to know and understand always who is coming across our border. We are a border State in Michigan. Every country in the world has a right to know who is coming inside its borders.

So in the Senate, I am going to spend my time protecting American citizens, as I have always done. For that, we need the best military in the world, one that understands the threats that are coming around the corner, not just the threats of the past.

We need to be able to control our own fate. That means not letting our national debt be controlled by countries like China.

And we need to understand that, to make people safe in America, we need a strong leadership role in the world, because the next 100 years are either going to be dominated by the United States of America or by China.

And while we make mistakes every single day, and I will own that—I served in Iraq, and I saw it close up—I will take American leadership over Chinese leadership any day of the week.

So, in conclusion, let me just say that we all know—everyone here knows—that we are going through an extremely tough time in American politics. We know that, when people look back on this period in history, they are going to say: That was the moment that Americans were turned against each other, when neighbors turned against each other.

But it is not the end, and it is not always going to be this way. As Michiganders, we understand how to survive bad times by rallying together, by helping one another, by living up to our Midwestern values, and getting back into the fight.

As elected leaders, and certainly as a Senator, I have a responsibility to chart the path through the dark tunnel and into the light, not by just complaining and whinging that it is all bad but by charting a strategy from beginning to end on how we get through this moment.

And we will. For God's sake, people, the Detroit Lions are going to win the National Championship and the Super-

bowl, and they were in the toilet for years.

So it is my privilege to stand on behalf of my State here. It is the most important thing I have ever done. It is the most impactful thing I will ever do. It is my job, as that next generation of leader, to change the course of this place and this country, and I commit to you I will not let you down.

Thank you very much.

I yield the floor.

(Applause.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RICKETTS). The Senator from Hawaii.

HOUSING

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, when it comes to one of the most basic necessities in life for people—housing—both political parties have failed. Both political parties have failed.

Housing costs more than ever today, with the median home costing five times as much as the median income for your average American. First-time home buyers are fewer and older than ever. One in four renters is being forced to spend more than half of their income on rent, and homelessness is plaguing more people than ever before.

This crisis was not inevitable; it is a problem that the government has created. There is not enough housing in this country because we have made it virtually impossible to build housing. Ask anyone who has tried to build anything—a shed, a patio, an accessory dwelling unit for their in-laws. They will tell you that the moment you try to do something, there are endless procedural hurdles and regulatory barriers that immediately get in the way—exclusionary zoning; minimum lot sizes; height restrictions; requirements for multiple staircases; environmental reviews; dozens of public meetings, where the grouchiest people in your neighborhood can stop the most virtuous project in your neighborhood; extensive permitting paperwork; years-long battles with community organizations and boards. And if you want to expedite your permit, you can pay a permit expeditor. If you have 10 grand, they will put your thing on the top of the pile.

Nobody should like this system.

I cannot think of something so essential to American life—housing, whether you rent or you want to own—so essential to American life where the government has created the shortage on purpose, and then it strokes its chin, confused as to why there is a shortage. There is a shortage because of us. There is a shortage because of the government itself making it hard to construct the thing we all say we want.

But the good news is this: If the government got us into this mess in the first place, it can help to get us out. Mainly, that means getting out of our own way and not preventing the very things we say we like.

A lot of progressives in my own party like to say “We are for housing. We are for clean energy. We are for transit and infrastructure,” but you can't be for

something if you don't want it near you. If you are for housing, you have to see the housing. If you are for clean energy, you are going to see a windmill or wind farm or a nuclear powerplant somewhere.

As we envision a just and sustainable and wealthy country, we have to actually make the things that make us more sustainable and wealthy. There is nothing progressive about preventing a nurse or a firefighter or a teacher or a small business owner from actually living in the community in which they work. There is nothing progressive about making people drive an hour to work or, in Hawaii, forcing people to leave the State.

Lawn sizes and building heights don't make neighborhoods; people do. Yet you will often hear people who oppose new housing say things like: We want to preserve the unique character of the neighborhood.

And this is something that I am embarrassed to say I didn't know until I came to the U.S. Senate. I didn't understand what those words mean and where they came from. They are echoing a dark time in American history of the Jim Crow era. It was a time when communities specifically codified into law language that prohibited Black people and other racial minorities from moving into certain neighborhoods. The racial covenants would literally say:

No lot covered by this indenture, or any part thereof, shall ever be sold, resold, conveyed, granted, devised, leased or rented to or occupied by, or in any other way used by, any person or persons not of the Caucasian Race.

That is from a covenant in St. Louis from 1949. And there were contracts just like that one in neighborhoods all across the country. Then, racial covenants were outlawed, but their legacy continues today because what happened was the racists, after this was outlawed, figured out a proxy for race. They figured out a way to keep people separated, figured out a way to keep people out of their neighborhoods, figured out a way to make housing more constrained. And that is exclusionary zoning. That is minimum lot sizes. That means you need interior staircases. All of these things that sound virtuous—safety, sanitation, environmental review, historic preservation—all of those things actually matter, but understand that they are being weaponized against the working class. They are being weaponized against the working class.

I am not sure if this is permissible under the rules, but I am looking at a bunch of Senate pages, all 16 years old, trying to figure out: Where am I going to live when I get a job? Do I have to live with my folks and for how long? Am I going to be able to move to a suburb or a city or stay in my hometown? Where am I going to live?

So how do we fix it? First of all, government has a role that is not just getting out of the way. On the financing

side, on the public housing stock side, on vouchers, on section 8, on HUD-VASH, there are lots of programs that work—on the low-income housing tax rate. There are a lot of government things that we do that have helped and can help more.

But the truth is that the throughput capacity of the system is being constrained by the government itself. We could allocate \$3 trillion to affordable housing, and if it is still hard to build a house in an individual neighborhood, all that money would get stuck. Actually, the State of California tried that. They allocated an enormous amount of money to housing, and they didn't get very much built.

The county of Maui, many years ago, said: No new housing unless it is affordable—which kind of lands on the ears in a wonderful way, right? No new housing unless it is affordable. Do you know what happened? There was no new housing at all for a full decade.

So we just have to embrace, on the left—the reason I care about this is because I think it is the single most impactful economic policy that we could implement, to make it easier to build housing for working people, for students, for the disabled, for the elderly, for the entrepreneurs, for cities, for towns, for rural neighborhoods. This is important because I care about that.

Now, if you are a conservative, the basic principle is almost even more simple, which is: It is your damn property. You should be permitted to do what you want with your property within certain safety boundaries and all the rest of it.

But if it is your property and you have a quarter of an acre and you want to build an accessory dwelling unit for your kids because they are adults and they just had a baby, you should be allowed to do pretty much whatever you want with your property. But we have inverted the presumption so that it is your neighbors that get to decide what you get to do with your property.

So if you are a private property rights person, you should love the idea of deregulating the housing market. If you are a progressive and you see how much people are struggling right now, you should love the idea of deregulating the housing market.

We need to reform land-use laws for upzoning to allow higher density, reducing minimum lot sizes, deploying manufactured homes, enabling single-room occupancy development wherever multifamily housing is allowed. We know all this works because it is working in certain places.

It is hard to keep any issue out of the partisan crossfire. It really is. It is hard to keep anything out of the partisan crossfire. Everyone retreats to their own corner and starts talking past each other and trying to light the algorithm on fire.

Our ability to come together, use common sense, and find a way forward will affect how people live and succeed for generations to come.

Just this week, Senator BANKS and I introduced legislation to incentivize local governments to build more housing near federally funded transit projects. Senator YOUNG and I introduced the YIMBY Act, the Yes in My Backyard Act, which encourages localities to cut onerous regulations and adopt pro-housing policies.

We can and we do disagree about almost everything, but on this, we should all be able to agree that in the richest country in the history of the world, people should not have to worry about having a roof over their heads. We can fix this, and we must.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

NOMINATION OF AARON SZABO

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, the Trump corruption of the Environmental Protection Agency continues apace, so I am here today in opposition to the nomination of Aaron Szabo to serve as the Assistant Administrator for the Office of Air and Radiation over at EPA.

The Constitution provides the President the power to nominate ministers and officers of the United States and the Senate advice and consent power over his nominees.

I think we probably agree that the Constitution means something, that advice and consent is not a mere rubberstamp. But when a nominee comes before your committee, they should provide straight answers to questions. Well, this nominee dodged our questions and then doubled down with more obfuscation when we gave him a chance to clarify through questions for the record. That alone should be sufficient reason to withhold consent until proper answers are obtained.

This character Szabo is credited by name as a contributor to the EPA chapter of Project 2025, the extremist, rightwing, fossil fuel-funded blueprint for dismantling the Federal Government, which President Trump is now dutifully implementing. Some of the environmental highlights from Project 2025? Weaken the Clean Air Act by reversing the endangerment finding. Purge the Agency and bring to its staff “trauma.” In case you aren't keeping score at home, EPA Administrator Zeldin is already hard at work on these.

Szabo was an advisor to the America First Policy Institute—the Trump-aligned think tank funded by fossil fuel and aligned with Big Oil interests. He worked as a lobbyist, pushing the interests of major polluters like members of the American Petroleum Institute. Well, chief on the wish list of his former clients is rescission of the EPA's endangerment finding. That is a 2009 evidence-based determination that greenhouse gases are, in fact, harmful to human welfare and the environment. When that rule was adopted back in 2009, it had actually already been settled scientific fact for decades that greenhouse gases harmed the public

and the environment. Now, 16 years later, the evidence has only gotten stronger, and the looming economic dangers of climate collapse have only gotten more evident. The only people who benefit from repealing the endangerment finding are the planet's biggest polluters—Mr. Szabo's former clients.

To me, Mr. Szabo's recent work and professional affiliations should also render him unfit for the role to which he has been nominated. Is this really what we want for the EPA? Is this really how we protect clean air—by helping polluters rule the roost?

It gets worse.

When questioned at his hearing about his ties to Trump's donors' extreme anti-environmental agenda, Szabo provided obfuscatory answers. He acknowledged that he was a contributor to Project 2025, which he could hardly fail to do since his name was on it, but he stated that he kept no records—no records—of his contributions to that effort. He was asked whether he had no records because he never had any or because he had deleted them. He couldn't answer. He bumbled, stumbled, bobbed, weaved, dodged, and, ultimately, refused to answer, although he did concede that some of the advice he had provided was written advice.

Following up with subsequent QFRs on the topic, we got from Mr. Szabo a sudden response, albeit one that does not seem credible, particularly in light of his previous inability to answer the question.

He wrote:

Like millions of other Americans, I have been the subject of attempts to steal personal information through electronic means. I, like many federal government employees, had their completed Standard Form 86, titled “Questionnaire for National Security Positions,” stolen in 2015 that included sensitive information. I periodically delete old messages and documents that are no longer necessary to help ensure privacy and security to my family, those I interact with, and myself.

Seriously? Szabo had plenty of time to provide that response during his confirmation hearing, but he never mentioned anything of the sort. His contribution to the anti-environmental portion of Project 2025 is hard to connect with any issues of family, privacy, and security.

To be clear, this is not entirely about whether you approve or disapprove of Project 2025. What is relevant here is the extreme degree of evasiveness in answering or, more exactly, not answering our questions. Senators are constitutionally obligated to provide advice and consent on the President's nominees. So we should demand better than this in the people we confirm to serve in the most senior positions in our government. The current status of “dodge ‘em” in our nomination hearings is a disgrace.

Beyond Mr. Szabo's own questionable qualifications and his deceptiveness and his troublesome testimony, we also cannot ignore the full-on corruption of the EPA on behalf of Trump's polluting