

colleagues to join me in using the power we have to fight back.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). The Senator from West Virginia.

PERMITTING REFORM

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, I am really pleased to be here on the last week—or around the last week—that we are going to be here before we return in September. I am particularly happy to be here with the ranking member of the Environment and Public Works Committee to talk about an issue that I think we both care about. So I am going to start off and then yield to Senator WHITEHOUSE.

As we both know, for too long, critical projects central to American energy development, infrastructure improvement, and economic development have been trapped in a cycle of redundant reviews, shifting goalposts, endless redtape, and regulatory uncertainty.

Businesses large and small, looking to build things in our country again, really need the certainty that is necessary for long-term investments. And projects needed to deploy new energy technologies and efforts to restore the environment have been caught in the same regulatory swamp as well. This has been loaded on for years. Years of changes in guidance have created a complex web of ever expanding, duplicative, and contradictory requirements, while Congress has not stepped in to provide the clarifications that our country needs. All this has led to lost jobs, missed economic opportunities, and higher prices across America, underpinning the importance of comprehensive reform to our environmental review and permitting processes.

I can tell you, I get asked about this consistently, every day, and more than a few times a day. So let me talk a little bit about my home State of West Virginia. I have seen firsthand how projects that our communities rely on face needless delays and how costs are then shifted to our families, who pay more for energy, housing, transportation, and basic goods as a result.

These types of delays nearly stopped what will become one of the most environmentally friendly steel production facilities in the world, which will employ over 1,000 people in Mason County.

Top highway projects like Corridor H that would improve both safety, mobility, and create economic development have encountered multiple permitting delays and uncertainty under a litany of environmental statutes.

And even West Virginia waterline extensions, broadband deployment, and bridge replacements have all faced delays from the Federal permitting process.

If you spend time in my State and visit our communities and travel across our mountains, it is obvious how important these projects are to our State of West Virginia. They impact

everything from how we heat our homes to how we connect our schools with internet and maintain the roads and bridges that our residents travel on every single day. Point blank, these delays are holding our State and every State back from reaching our full potential, robbing our people of investments and economic development that would improve the quality of their lives.

So I believe it is time for Congress to act. Clearly, I am no stranger to the ever elusive topic of permitting reform. Throughout my time in the Senate, I have introduced multiple bills on the subject and have been involved in the regulations on this topic. And while we were able to include some reforms in the bipartisan Fiscal Responsibility Act, it is very clear that much more needs to be done.

The fact of the matter is, each one of us in this Chamber has a critical need in our State that could be addressed by improving our permitting and environmental processes, like building more housing—we always hear about a housing shortage—or bringing energy projects online—we hear about the expansion of nuclear that are going to be held into the permitting process—or improving the conditions of surface transportation infrastructure, just to name a few.

No matter what our constituents need, we all know that permitting reform is needed to deliver projects more quickly and more efficiently.

In my role as the chair of the EPW Committee, where we have jurisdiction over the laws that set the framework for our environmental review and permitting processes, I could not be more earnest in my desire to lead this effort with our ranking member. And our committee's involvement on this issue remains apparent by the delivery not just of this speech, as we are doing together, but as we continue to work together with the goal of crafting bipartisan legislation.

Together, we started bipartisan conversations in our committee in February when we held a hearing to gain the perspectives of leaders who are directly involved with navigating these processes to ensure that we would gather a complete look at all of the issues. We kept the hearing record open for over a month to give all stakeholders the opportunity to share their experience with the existing environmental review and permitting processes and identify challenges and recommend possible solutions to this Congress.

From this record, we garnered 107 submissions representing 146 individual organizations and an additional 854 individual requests on how to improve the Federal environmental review and permitting process. These responses have helped the EPW Committee identify the challenges that persist across the wide variety of projects and to identify consensus on potential solutions to address these challenges.

While we have talked about the issue of permitting for a number of years in Congress, it is important that we currently find ourselves, I think, in like thought all across the spectrum. Each branch of the Federal Government—from executive to Congress and the judiciary—are united in our dissatisfaction with the current permitting and environmental review processes.

The Trump administration has taken numerous actions to cut redtape and to put the United States in its best possible position to grow our economy and create jobs. The Supreme Court delivered a unanimous decision in the Seven County Infrastructure Coalition case in May that validated what many of my colleagues and I have long been saying, and that is that the responsibilities of Federal Agencies under the NEPA policy act have evolved beyond what Congress intended, creating roadblocks instead of considering the environment in Federal decision-making.

Right now, we have the momentum, I believe, needed to deliver meaningful and lasting reforms to the environmental review and permitting process, and I believe this is an unprecedented opportunity and something we can truly accomplish. I do believe—and Senator WHITEHOUSE and I know this well—that there are areas of strong disagreement in this area between the two of us, and what we are going to try to do is to find those areas of like thinking that moves the process along. No matter how difficult it might be, this is the only way we get a permanent solution so that we don't see the swings of the environmental process that we have seen over the last few years.

So, to start, durable and implementable reforms need to be successful. They have to be bipartisan. Legislation that the Senate crafts must take into account all types of projects, not just politically favored projects, no matter who is favoring them, or projects that will support the infrastructure needs of some Americans but not others.

We must provide clarity and transparency in these processes and be thoughtful in the way we craft the legislation. We need to address every stage of these processes to find efficiencies, while balancing public health, the environment, and the needs of our economy. And our legislation must establish guardrails that cease the endless amounts of Agency delays and litigation that stunt the development of our projects. I have seen investments in my State collapse under the weight of legal challenges, denying benefits to those that need it the most.

I want to stress that modernizing these processes does not mean cutting corners or weakening our environmental and public health protections, and this is exceedingly important to all of us and to the process. It means focusing the government on meeting the needs of the American people, ensuring

the quality of our environment for generations to come, and making the processes more efficient, predictable, and transparent so that they are not stuck in a bureaucratic purgatory of endless litigation.

So the reality is this: Hard-working Americans want a government that works for them, not one that keeps them waiting for the benefits that many of these projects promise to their communities. And what happens when you wait? If the project still goes forward, it gets more and more and more expensive with time.

I was encouraged to see bipartisan efforts from our colleagues in the House of Representatives, as last week Natural Resources Committee Chairman BRUCE WESTERMAN and Representative JARED GOLDEN announced a proposal to address many of the concerns I just laid out.

So as negotiations continue in the Senate, we must remember that it will take a collaboration of both Chambers and the administration to get impactful legislation across the finish line. The opportunity is here. This is right in front of us. And I can guarantee you that I will be at the forefront of these efforts to make sure that these reforms can become a reality.

So I encourage my colleagues to heed the importance of this moment. Many of our colleagues are talking about this and have great expertise in this area, and we need your help.

With that, I yield the floor and am here to listen to my friend Senator WHITEHOUSE.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I am pleased to join my colleague from the Mountain State of West Virginia to talk about permitting reform. People listening should know that we work together well, that I like her personally, and that I am grateful to her for her support of important Rhode Island projects that we have gotten cleared.

On permitting reform, there has long been bipartisan interest—interest to speed the construction of transportation projects on housing; interest to deliver cheaper, cleaner, and more reliable energy for American families.

As I have often said, the Federal Government often moves far too slowly, and permitting is a prime example of this. Projects undergoing environmental reviews are frequently stuck in limbo if just one Agency drags its feet. “Interagency process” is the technical term for multiagency decision-making. And interagency process is too often the enemy of effective governance, too often the executive branch refuge of incompetence, too often the executive branch shield against accountability, too often the executive branch screen of bureaucratic delay.

Permitting reform is a golden opportunity to fix this. We should make Federal permitting faster and more efficient, all while incentivizing project developers to engage with stakeholders

early on in the process rather than drag it out. It currently takes far too long to build important projects in this country, and while Federal permitting is not the only bottleneck, it is frequently a major one.

In the last two decades, China has built more than 25,000 miles of high-speed rail lines, while the United States has completed zero. We can and must do better. Chair CAPITO and I are both ready to do our part to move permitting reform forward and, ultimately, across the finish line. We are already engaging with our colleagues in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee because those two committees have to work together to make this work. And I hope Republicans in the House are able to move to responsible legislation as soon as this fall.

But I must remind everyone again, because I have said this frequently, that it makes no sense for Democrats to agree to permitting reform until the Trump administration stops its lawless disregard for legislative authority and judicial orders. The lawlessness is rampant, and it is hurting people and communities and projects. Until the administration shows it will honor its oath to faithfully and impartially execute the laws—its constitutional oath—how can we trust that any legislative compromise on permitting reform will be executed fairly? And if we can't trust that, what is the point?

Trump has fired independent Agency commissioners, defied court orders, and threatened to weaponize the government against his perceived political enemies. His rescissions destroy bipartisan appropriations accords. The Trump administration's record on this is bad, and on energy policy, it is particularly awful.

The President declared a fake energy emergency despite record energy production in America. He defied the very dictionary by defining “energy” to exclude wind energy and solar energy, the fastest growing American energy sectors. He directed a halt to offshore wind permitting, even stopping work on an offshore wind project actively under construction.

Hang up your hardhats, guys; we are shutting down the project.

So if we want a permitting bill, this unconstitutional lawlessness has to end. It is raising utility bills, and it is endangering our energy supply. Just last year, 95 percent of the new energy on the grid was wind, solar, and batteries—95 percent. This lawlessness kills that growth.

And—I will add—we need offshore wind. I have a permitting reform proposal for offshore wind. With demand skyrocketing, we need clean, reliable, and domestic resources like offshore wind. Just ask the head of the North American Electric Reliability Council, the impartial source on grid reliability.

Our constituents are now facing higher costs on everything from groceries to homeowner's insurance,

thanks to climateflation. Permitting done right will deliver cheaper, cleaner, and more reliable energy and help stave off the worst economic harms of climate change.

Let's be clear: Without domestic clean energy, we are looking at a vastly more expensive future. Renewable resources have near-zero marginal cost. They drive down the cost of electricity demand. States with more renewable resources do better heading off electricity price increases than States with fewer renewables.

And without domestic clean energy, we are looking at an energy future for America driven by Chinese innovation, Chinese industry, and Chinese power.

The global future of energy is clean. We are either part of it or we are left behind. Peak demand is expected to grow by 15 percent for summer peaks and 18 percent for winter peaks over the next 10 years, raising concerns about energy shortfalls.

What would reduce the risk of shortfalls? Better permitting, bringing more renewables onto the grid, building transmission lines. Instead, we are moving backwards, in the opposite direction.

Seventy percent of transmission lines are more than 25 years old, and they are showing their age. Last year, we managed to complete all of 322 miles of high-voltage transmission lines. It is the third slowest year in the past 15 years.

Thousands of electricity generation projects are waiting to connect to the grid. As of last April, they have added to 2.6 terawatts of power stalled for grid connections and millions of engineering, construction, and manufacturing jobs also stalled in part because of our inability to build the transmission lines for those connections.

We are entering a climate economic danger zone as climate upheaval hits property insurance markets and threatens to upend mortgage markets, which count on insurance, which threatens in turn to tank property values if you can't get mortgages, which could take down our whole economy. This is the path we are now on.

The Fed Chairman testified in the Banking Committee that in the next 10 to 15 years, there will be entire regions of our country where you can't get a mortgage anymore—entire regions.

Failing to permit and build the clean, modern grid we need isn't just foolish, it is dangerous. It helps put us on a path to climate and economic disaster.

Let's stop pretending fossil fuel giveaways are energy policies. Let's stop pretending that solar and wind are not energy. Let's stop revoking funds for transmission projects that we need. Let's stop acting like the clean, modern grid we need will build itself. Instead, let's build the clean energy future that brings down costs, creates jobs, and protects our communities, with the urgency this moment demands. And let's do it, Madam Chairman, together.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

The Senator from Hawaii.

GAZA

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, the mass starvation and death sweeping through Gaza is a moral tragedy and a strategic abomination.

What started as a war with a just cause—to go after Hamas for the unspeakable atrocities it committed on October 7 and bring home the hostages—quickly turned unjust and immoral.

Now, everybody knows how complicated and fraught the Middle East is. Everyone knows that navigating this generations-long conflict requires nuance and depth and a historical understanding in order to try to get it right. Everyone knows that smart and sincere and decent people can disagree on this issue. But what is happening today is entirely different. There is no excuse for this horrific suffering. It is not making Israel or Israelis or Jews any safer, nor is it helping to bring home the 50 remaining hostages who have been in brutal captivity for almost 2 years.

The fact that this catastrophe was preventable is precisely what makes it so indefensible. People have been warning for months that the Israeli Government's actions would result in exactly this kind of tragedy, where children are dying by the dozens and hundreds of thousands of people have been starving for days.

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, which Israel scrambled to set up 2 months ago, has failed. According to the BBC, where there used to be 400 U.N. aid distribution sites all across Israel and Gaza, there are now just 4 run by the GHF. As a result, a third of Gazans—a third of Gazans—are going multiple days in a row without eating.

The World Health Organization reports that at least 63 people—many of them children—have died from malnutrition this month alone, and more than 1,000 Palestinians have been killed while seeking aid at GHF sites, according to the U.N.

In May, the GHF's first executive director resigned, saying:

It is clear that it is not possible to implement this plan while also strictly adhering to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence.

Whether you believe this organization was set up to fail intentionally from the start or, more charitably, that the Israeli Government established it without understanding that it couldn't succeed, it doesn't matter. What is plainly obvious now is that it is not working.

You don't have to be some leftwing organization or get your data from the Hamas government to acknowledge that the GHF is failing at its fundamental mission of feeding people, which raises the question, why?

Here we have an Israeli security apparatus that can and did synchronize an attack of exploding pagers across an entire country. They can reach and gather intelligence from the high command of their greatest adversaries. The IDF is widely viewed as punching way above its weight in almost every way. Yet Israel is asserting that, given all of those capabilities, the one thing they can't do is facilitate aid distribution. That is too hard for them.

Food and medical assistance routinely get into conflict zones around the world—Yemen, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of Congo. Gaza should not be any different.

What is different are the stated goals of the extremists in the Israeli Government:

The only way to win the war and bring back the hostages is to completely stop the "humanitarian" aid, conquer the entire Gaza Strip, and encourage voluntary migration.

That was the National Security Minister of the Government of Israel—completely stopping humanitarian aid, conquering the entire Gaza strip, and encouraging migration. These are their words; these are not my words.

As the starvation takes hold, their response is to deny that it is even happening. There is no starvation in Gaza. Who said that? The Prime Minister of Israel.

Ben Gvir added—I have to collect myself before saying what Ben Gvir said:

If they were hungry, they would have returned the hostages home.

"If they were hungry, they would have returned the hostages home." It is worth pausing on that for just a moment. Too many people in the Netanyahu government make no distinction between the actual enemy that is Hamas and innocent civilians.

The idea that a desperate mother, malnourished herself and out of breast milk for her infant, or a 7-year-old running to the front of an aid line to get whatever scraps he can for himself and his siblings—the idea that these people are in charge of which hostages are released and when, that they suddenly are being held to account for the actions of Hamas on October 7, is preposterous. It is another example of the casual dismissal of civilian death and suffering as if it is an inevitable consequence—war is hell and all of that. But what possible explanation is there for letting infants and 2- and 3-year-olds starve? What tactical advantage is being gained?

Standing up for our shared humanity, whatever our other differences and preferences, should not be a matter of controversy, but too often, when someone is critical of Israel and they are a Jew, they are characterized as a self-hating Jew. And if someone is critical

of Israel and they are not a Jew, they are characterized as anti-Semitic.

I want to be crystal clear. Anti-Semitism is among the oldest and most vile prejudices that exist. It is real, it is scary, and it is on the rise in the United States. It should be fought at every turn—left, right, and center. Anyone who simply waves it away or denies the urgency of addressing it is either not paying attention or lying.

But criticizing the conduct of this war; criticizing Minister Ben Gvir, who talks about ethnic cleansing; criticizing the withholding of aid; criticizing the excessive tolerance for civilian casualties; criticizing Prime Minister Netanyahu's apparent willingness to cling to power at the expense of Israel, Israelis, and Jews everywhere—that is a separate matter. Everybody gets to do that, just like Americans get to criticize their President without hating America or the people within it. People are more than their governments.

The Government of Israel is behaving terribly. The conduct of this war is indefensible. And it is not in spite of my Jewishness and my Judaism that I say that; it is because of it.

There are a lot of people, including people I know personally—and I believe this—who believe in the sacred idea of Israel.

They are good people, and this cannot be about vanquishing one side of the political spectrum, whether that is the left and center left or the right and the alt right. This is about grounding ourselves in a very basic principle, which is, whatever else we are fighting about, can we please hold the children harmless?

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call with respect to the Gaiser nomination.

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

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The senior assistant executive clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 182, Thomas Gaiser, of Ohio, to be an Assistant Attorney General.

John Thune, Eric Schmitt, John R. Curtis, Tim Scott of South Carolina, Bill Cassidy, Jon Husted, Steve Daines, Marsha Blackburn, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Ron Johnson, John Barrasso, Tim Sheehy, Roger F. Wicker, Mike Rounds, Bernie Moreno, Pete Ricketts, Jim Justice.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the mandatory