

Hello, my name is Aaron Dunbar. I come from the very small town of Lowell in southeast Ohio, located about thirty minutes from Parkersburg, West Virginia. Parkersburg was in the spotlight recently for its depiction in the film *Dark Waters*, a real life story about how the DuPont Chemical Company knowingly poisoned city residents with the so-called “forever chemical” known as C8.

I had the privilege of seeing this excellent film twice in the city of Parkersburg. On my second viewing, I had a discussion with a city resident in the theater with me before the film started. She told me about how she, her husband, and two of her neighbors each only had a single kidney as a result of being poisoned by DuPont. Needless to say, this resonated with me in a very big way.

Time and again, average Americans find themselves at the cruel whims of profit-driven corporations, who regard nothing as sacred so long as it interferes with their ultimate pursuit of the bottom line. We are subjected to legalized murder at the hands of giant polluters who face increasingly scarce regulation, by a government which repeatedly betrays its citizens by failing to hold such companies to account.

The fossil fuel industry is one of, if not *the* worst offender throughout all of human history in this regard, and I say this without a trace of hyperbole.

By May of 2018, over 20,000 scientists from at least 184 countries around the world signed onto a research paper entitled “World Scientists' Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice,” urging people and governments across the globe to take meaningful and serious action to combat the looming threat of climate change. A second paper, signed by over 11,000 scientists, warned of “untold suffering” that would occur should we fail to act now.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC, stated in October of 2018 that we have a little over a decade to counteract the worst effects of climate change. Emphasis on the phrase, “*worst effects*” here.

To quote from NASA’s official website, “Even if we stopped emitting greenhouse gases today, global warming would continue to happen for at least several more decades, if not centuries. That’s because it takes a while for the planet (for example, the oceans) to respond, and because carbon dioxide – the predominant heat-trapping gas – lingers in the atmosphere for hundreds of years. There is a time lag between what we do and when we feel it.”

We know beyond a doubt that anthropogenic climate change is already happening. In November of 2019, geologist James Lawrence Powell concluded that scientific consensus on the causes of climate change had reached an unprecedented level of 100%, based on a survey of nearly 12,000 peer-reviewed articles related to the subject.

What’s more, we see the effects of global warming all around us. From record-breaking temperatures to once-in-a-lifetime storms becoming the new normal. From worsening droughts, floods, famines and wildfires across the globe, to a loss of biodiversity so severe that scientists have begun referring to it as a “sixth mass extinction event.”

Consider the heartbreaking wildfires that have torn across the continent of Australia. In total, well over a billion animals have been killed over the course of the unnaturally severe conflagrations, pushing numerous species to the brink of extinction.

Please read that again: One. Billion. Animals.

Actually, the number is likely closer to 1.25 billion, but we’ve become so desensitized to these tragedies by this point that a mere 250 million animals evidently seem as though they can safely be rounded down.

As shocking as this may seem to us, none of it should truly come as a surprise. A 2008 report by Australia's own government predicted that climate change would begin to set off earlier and more intense wildfire seasons beginning around 2020. "We knew this was going to happen," says Australian climate scientist Sarah Perkins Kirkpatrick, even as her government continues to ignore its scientists' findings.

Do you want to know who else knew about the catastrophic effects of climate change, even longer in advance, and failed to act on that information?

The fossil fuel industry.

As early as the 1970's, before climate change was anywhere near within the realm of public knowledge, Exxon Mobil was pumping vast sums of money into first investigating, then covering up, then buying off politicians to resist any meaningful action on climate change. Exxon knew for decades that the product they were selling to the American public was threatening the very survival of life on our planet, and yet it wasn't until April 2014, as the evidence became irrefutable, that they first released a report publicly acknowledging the monumental risks of global warming.

Referring in October to a graph drawn by a team of Exxon's researchers from the early 1980's, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez asked of former Exxon consultant Martin Hoffert during a House Oversight Committee hearing, "So in 1982 — seven years before I was even born — Exxon accurately predicted that by this year, 2019, the Earth would hit a carbon dioxide concentration of 415 parts per million and a temperature increase of 1 degree Celsius. Dr. Hoffert, is that correct?"

"We were excellent scientists," Dr. Hoffert answered simply.

And yet for over thirty years, despite the absolute best science they had at their disposal, Exxon continued to conceal this information from the public. Knowing, even as they did so, that the product they were selling was actively poisoning our climate. Knowing that hundreds of millions of people would die or be displaced as a result of rising global temperatures, receding coastlines, and diseases locked in ice for millennia, able to spread freely with the diminishing of Earth's permafrost.

By what metric, other than the metric of short-term profit by any means necessary, can this be considered anything other than mass murder? And how, I wonder, can Exxon's atrocities be considered anything less than a crime against humanity, not to mention every other species on this planet?

They are far from alone, of course. Royal Dutch Shell PLC, known more commonly as Shell, produced a 28-minute film in 1991 entitled "Climate of Concern," in an effort to warn the public about the catastrophic dangers of climate change. Admirable as this may seem, far less admirable has been Shell's efforts over the years to lobby against meaningful climate action, all but sealing the fate they seemed so earnest in warning us about.

In November of last year, meanwhile, a university researcher discovered industry journals dating as far back as 1966, revealing that coal executives were well aware of the effects that burning their product would have on our climate. Fossil fuel companies have even gone so far over the years as to utilize the same lobbyists that once represented the tobacco industry to obfuscate the science of climate change in the minds of the general public, thus helping to prevent government action.

To any observer blessed with even the slightest measure of objectivity, there is a clear and unmistakable villain that pervades this entire ugly narrative. Namely, the fossil fuel industry, as well as those who cater to its interests.

Yet to say this industry has received even the meagerest slap on the wrist for its crimes would be a perverse inaccuracy. Instead, the very industries that have pillaged our world have only drawn their hooks deeper in as the Trump administration continues to strip away at environmental protections, at the exact moment when scientists tell us that the need to slash emissions has never been more urgent.

The fossil fuel industry has become nothing short of deranged. Its focus on profits over people is nothing less than psychopathic. And the government's decision to cater to its whims, time and time again, is the ultimate form of betrayal.

And despite all of this, it isn't the big polluters, or the government, or any of those complicit in this sprawling machinery who are vilified by legislation such as Senate Bill 33. Instead, the true villains are cast as hapless victims, and the role of the criminal, the transgressor, and the terrorist, is instead thrust upon those who dare to peacefully assert their rights against such tyranny.

Make no mistake about it. Senate Bill 33 serves absolutely no purpose but to intimidate those who would dare to raise their voices against the fossil fuel industry, at a time when our planet's very future is at stake. SB 33 criminalizes peaceful protest, turning one of our most basic and essential freedoms, protected by the First Amendment, into a felony, punishable with exorbitant fines and prison sentences that are nothing short of draconian. Most perversely of all, SB 33 attempts to delegitimize the vital work of the climate change movement, all while protecting the cabal of Machiavellian conspirators now dismantling our planet with impunity.

These tactics are to be expected at this point from those standing so resolutely on the wrong side of history. Efforts at criminalizing the climate movement have cropped up all across the globe, as peaceful activism is threatened with arrest, lengthy jail sentences, militarized force, and worse.

It was recently revealed, for instance, that Terrorism Police in the United Kingdom had listed the popular climate protest group Extinction Rebellion as a so-called “extremist ideology.” Extinction Rebellion, whose stated purpose is to spark climate action through nonviolent civil disobedience, was listed alongside Islamist and neo-Nazi groups in guides distributed to teachers, law enforcement, and government organizations.

Police have since admitted that XR’s designation as an extremist group was a mistake, and announced that they would recall the above documents, even as it has since been revealed that Greenpeace, an even more mainstream environmental organization, was included on this very same list.

Meanwhile, as wildfires raged across Australia and Prime Minister Scott Morrison was away on a Hawaiian vacation, thirteen-year-old climate activist Izzy Raj-Seppings was being threatened with jail by police for her brave act of peaceful protest. Numerous indigenous activists in Brazil have been murdered under far-right President Jair Bolsonaro while defending the Amazon rainforest. In July of last year, a watchdog group reported that a total of 164 environmental activists had been killed around the world throughout 2018.

It’s tempting to say that the worst of these atrocities are carried out by foreign governments. But that simply isn’t the case.

I highly recommend taking a moment to search online for one of my favorite photographs. Reminiscent of the infamous “Tiananmen Square” moment in China, a chilling snapshot by

photographer Ryan Vizzions depicts Lakota water protector Mega Mae Plenty Chief riding on horseback, staring down militarized police vehicles amidst protests over the wildly unpopular Keystone XL Pipeline. Throughout the course of the months-long standoff over said pipeline, law enforcement blasted Indigenous activists with water cannons at freezing temperatures, tear gassed them and pummeled them with rubber bullets. All for the terrible crime of wanting clean drinking water, and to protect the land they called home.

Activist Sophia Wilansky, demonstrating alongside the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, asserts that her arm was nearly blown off by an “explosive munition launched by a heavily militarized law enforcement presence” during a peaceful protest over the Keystone XL pipeline. It is worth noting that Senate Bill 33, in consideration here today, is a shining example of “critical infrastructure” legislation, which has been drafted across the country in response to the events of Standing Rock. Such legislation serves no purpose but to stifle the voices of peaceful protestors, in order to more effectively cater to the demands of the fossil fuel industry.

The list goes on and on, from the ludicrous legislation that Republican Keith Kempenich attempted to pass in North Dakota a few years ago, essentially legalizing vehicular manslaughter against peaceful protestors blocking roadways, to this sham of a bill now being considered here in Ohio.

The message, repulsive as it is, could not possibly be clearer. Dare to question the titans of industry who control the world, even as they corrupt it to its core, and you’ll likely be putting your freedom, your civil liberties, and your very life at risk.

I realize I’ve gone on for quite a while at this point, so allow me to conclude with a favorite quotation of mine from the film *Dark Waters*, which I believe encapsulates the existential peril of the matter presently being discussed:

“The system is rigged. They want us to think it'll protect us, but that's a lie. *We* protect us. *We* do. Nobody else. Not the companies, not the scientists, not the government. *Us.*”

Legislation such as Senate Bill 33 strips away citizens' last vestige of defense against a system that has consistently failed them. This bill is unjust, immoral, and unconstitutional, and I encourage all those who find themselves cheering on its passage to take a long, hard look in the mirror, and consider what it is they're truly advocating.

Increasingly we find ourselves living in an era of Davids and Goliaths. And far too often, we're rooting for Goliath.

Thank you for your time.