

need for this body—the greatest deliberative body in the world—to deliberate upon a situation of grave importance to the world—the reality of climate change and what we as American leaders can do to tackle it. I will take the floor to talk about this in the coming days.

VENEZUELA

Mr. President, I actually rise now not on this topic, which affects Virginia significantly, especially sea level rise, but I want to talk a little about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. I do this on behalf of Venezuelans. I do this on behalf of Venezuelan-Americans, many of whom live in Virginia, but I also do it on behalf of democracies, because what is happening in Venezuela today demonstrates, really, in just one country, a global battle between democracies and authoritarian nations.

Authoritarian nations are supporting the regime of Maduro, and the democracies of the world are supporting the interim government of President Guaido.

If you want to know, circa 2019, in the battle being waged between authoritarians and democracies, Venezuela is a place where you can see it in one country. You see this global challenge between democracy and dictatorship.

The Maduro regime has been destroying Venezuela, which is home to the world's largest oil reserve, and it was once, in recent history, the richest country in all of Latin America. It is now in full-fledged economic and political collapse, with nearly 80 percent of the country's population living below the poverty line and more than half of the families unable to meet their basic food needs.

Right now, inflation in Venezuela is 2.7 million percent and will grow to 10 million percent this year, and most Venezuelans can't afford one meal a day. Medicines and other lifesaving commodities are too expensive for the average citizen to purchase, while Maduro and his colleagues and cronies syphon funds from state-owned enterprises into personal accounts and prohibit humanitarian assistance from entering the country.

Infants have starved to death because their families couldn't afford or access formula. Infectious diseases like malaria, measles, and diphtheria, which were previously eradicated in Venezuela, are emerging as public health system catastrophes.

Maduro is using the power of the state to subjugate and repress the Venezuelan people. His security forces use detention, torture, and lethal force against demonstrators and political opposition in what the United Nations and the Organization of American States called possible crimes against humanity.

It has provoked a massive refugee crisis. There are 3.4 million people and

counting who have made the difficult decision to leave their homeland because life has become untenable. Many have come to Virginia and to the United States as they have fled two countries throughout the region and created Latin America's worst refugee crisis, which is worsening by the day. Make no mistake—this is a manmade political crisis in a beautiful nation with beautiful people that would have ample resources if it were not so poorly governed.

In May 2018, Maduro declared victory for a second term in office in an election so flawed that the Organization of American States, the European Union, and the United States refused to recognize it as legitimate.

Following months of protests, on January 23, the National Assembly, which is Venezuela's only democratic body, determined that Maduro had usurped the Office of the President, and in accordance with the Venezuelan Constitution's provision for succession—and this is important—the President of the National Assembly, Juan Guaido, assumed the role of the Interim President of Venezuela. Again, that was done pursuant to Venezuelan constitutional law. The announcement, which I supported, was swiftly backed by the United States, by the Organization of American States, and by over 50 countries worldwide, including most of the democracies of the West. In contrast, which nations are supporting the Maduro regime? They are Russia, China, Iran, Syria, Turkey, Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Belarus—authoritarian nations.

There is a clear international divide between democracies and authoritarians. We must defend our convictions and bolster the democracies of the world. It is about supporting the Venezuelan people, but it is also about sending an important message globally that the United States remains confident that democracy is the way for people to achieve their hopes and dreams, and when authoritarians try to crush the democratic desires of populations, the United States should be an ally.

The United States should never tell another nation who its leader should be. We have no business being in regime change. We support free and fair elections. We support constitutions. That is why I support the current interim Government of Venezuela, which has been designated pursuant to the Venezuelan Constitution.

I recently met with the Guaido interim government's representative to the United States. I was encouraged to hear that the National Assembly's goal was to move to a democratic system and replace the interim government with a national government that would follow free and transparent elections, which Maduro has blocked repeatedly. Support for this goal must continue to come from the international community, the Organization of American States, and other democracies.

A caution: As a missionary in Honduras in the 1970s, I lived in a military dictatorship, and I am keenly aware of the history and the legacy of U.S. intervention in the Americas. That is why I was very troubled and remain troubled by the Trump administration's threats of military intervention in Venezuela. That would be a massive mistake. The rhetoric is reckless and counterproductive. Our leaders should not be bombastic and enflame a delicate situation that could go in the direction of violence and civil unrest. In fact, the suggestion of U.S. military intervention actually strengthens the hand of the dictator because the Maduro dictatorship would like to blame Venezuela's economic challenges on Uncle Sam or the West rather than on its own mismanagement of the economy. The United States should not be making military threats against Venezuela.

There are many steps we can take, though, that would be appropriate. I support the increase in direct U.S. humanitarian aid for the Venezuelan people as the transition unfolds. It is unbelievable that for years, the government has refused to allow humanitarian aid to enter the country to help its own people. The scenes we have seen over the past weekend of roadblocks on highways entering Venezuela and the Venezuelan military fighting to stop humanitarian aid from reaching citizens epitomizes the Maduro regime's ongoing disregard for the plight of everyday people.

I support the long needed aid package that will help international organizations provide assistance inside Venezuela that interim President Guaido welcomes and that former President Maduro should welcome as well. That is why I joined Senator MENENDEZ in cosponsoring the Venezuela Humanitarian Relief Act and the Rule of Law Act, and I will support them in their reintroductions.

I support the United States in its playing a role in convincing other nations and the Organization of American States to also stand for the people of Venezuela. OAS's leadership is very strong, but in the OAS, every member country has one vote. Venezuela has used its petroleum reserves to convince a number of Caribbean nations to back the dictatorship. I think the United States could use very plain diplomacy with Caribbean nations to get them to support the democracy, the current interim government, and we could do that and attain some significant success.

We should amplify the pressure we have applied by recognizing the interim government and deploying humanitarian assistance to the border. South America is absorbing 3.4 million refugees from Venezuela. The Trump administration condemns the brutality of the Maduro Government, but we are reducing our support for refugees from Venezuela and elsewhere.

I think the crisis warrants the extension of temporary protected status to

the Venezuelans who are already in the United States. If the Trump administration is serious about helping Venezuela recover from a devastating crisis, it cannot require Venezuelans to return to a deteriorating security situation there.

It is not our place to dictate the negotiated terms of a resolution that will end this crisis. That is the role and the responsibility of the people of Venezuela and their representatives, but the United States and the international community should create the right environment for those negotiations to go forward, and they should provide the assistance to allow this transition to occur.

We don't want to see greater violence or greater civil war in Venezuela. Interim President Guaido's offer of amnesty to Maduro's military and political supporters who wish to end their support for autocratic rule is a good step, as is his explicit call for a transitional government and free and fair elections. His role should and must remain that of a steward until those elections take place pursuant to the Venezuelan Constitution.

There is an example in the region. The peace agreement in Colombia signaled the end of six decades of conflict. The hemisphere is on a trajectory toward peace with there being no ongoing hostilities in the more than 30 countries. It is critical that we keep it that way.

In conclusion, during my time in Honduras, I learned a very important prayer that we used to say at mealtime. It was this: (English translation of the statement made in Spanish is as follows:) "Lord, give bread to those who hunger and hunger for justice to those who have bread."

I call on this body and our colleagues in the international community to support the people of Venezuela in their quest for both bread and justice.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, before my colleague from Virginia leaves, I admire him so much. I just want to applaud him and applaud his early work as a missionary in Honduras.

During our past recess, Senator JEFF MERKLEY and I and four of our colleagues from the House were privileged to be a part of a 5-day congressional delegation to Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. We were there to find out how the Alliance for Prosperity was being implemented, of which the Senator has been very supportive, as have I, in order to focus on hope, economic opportunity, crime, violence, and corruption.

The Alliance for Prosperity is focused on all of those matters. The United States puts up some of the money to address them, but we expect the other countries, including Honduras, to put up even more. It is like being at Home Depot—you can do it, and we can help. For every \$1 in El Salvador, they put up \$7, and we leverage our money to get the support of foundations, NGOs, private companies, and others to do their share. It is like turning the course of an aircraft carrier, and it is starting to turn.

Probably late this week—maybe tomorrow—I suspect Senator MERKLEY and I will want to have a colloquy on the floor. It would be great if the Senator could join us because he has forgotten more about that part of the world than we will ever know.

Thank you.

I didn't come to the floor to focus on that, but I am glad I had the chance to since Senator KAINE was here.

NOMINATION OF ANDREW WHEELER

Mr. President, I rise this evening to continue to share with my colleagues the concerns I have about the nomination of Andrew Wheeler to be the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

I want to talk for a couple of minutes about an issue that is important for all Americans, and that is reducing mercury and air toxic pollution that affect the health especially of our children.

As a number of our colleagues know, reducing mercury and air toxic pollution from our Nation's powerplants is something of a passion for me, and I know it is for some of my colleagues, too, Democrats and Republicans. In my home State of Delaware, for example, we have made great strides in cleaning up our own air pollution. Unfortunately, a number of the upwind States to the west of us have not made the same commitment.

When I was the Governor of Delaware, I used to say I could have literally shut down Delaware's economy—I could have taken cars, trucks, and vans off of highways and shut down every business—and we still would have been out of compliance for air quality because of the pollution from other States. That is because over 90 percent of Delaware's air pollution comes from our neighboring States—over 90 percent.

This air pollution is not only dangerous to our hearts, to our lungs, and to our brains, but it also costs a great deal in doctor and hospital bills and in our quality of life. It makes healthcare costs in Delaware more expensive than in other places where they get cheap electricity. We ended up having to clean up our emissions. We have more expensive electricity and higher healthcare bills. It is just not fair.

Delaware has depended on the EPA to ensure our neighbors do their fair share so that we can protect our citi-

zens in the First State. Just recently, Delaware petitioned the EPA under something called section 126 of the Clean Air Act, which requires upwind powerplants that are located in other States to turn on and fully operate their installed pollution technology. I will say that again—to use their installed pollution technology. They are not to turn it off but to leave it on.

Unfortunately, Mr. Wheeler ignored the health of Delawareans. The people of Maryland had the same concern, and the people of Connecticut had the same concern. He rejected all of our petitions. Talk about the Golden Rule. How is that consistent with the Golden Rule of treating other people the way you want to be treated? It flies in the face of it. We thought it was unforgivable.

Some of the air pollution that crosses our border is toxic. It is coming into our State as a silent killer. It wasn't too long ago that uncontrolled fossil fuel powerplants were the largest source of unregulated mercury and air toxics in the country—coal-fired powerplants.

For those who may not know, mercury and other toxics, such as lead, arsenic, benzene, and acid gases, that are emitted by uncontrolled coal-fired powerplants get into our airways, our waterways, and our seafood. As we breathe and ingest these air toxics, they build up in our bodies and cause cancer, respiratory illness, mental impairment, and even death.

Mercury pollution is especially dangerous for unborn children, who can suffer long-lasting neurological damage if they are exposed during their development at very early ages—even before they are born. The American Academy of Pediatrics has stated there is no safe level of mercury exposure for children—none.

Almost two decades ago, Senator ALEXANDER and I led legislation that required utilities to reduce mercury emissions by 90 percent. At the time, most utilities told us that it could not be done or that it would be too expensive to achieve.

In 2012, which was a few years later, the EPA implemented something called the mercury and air toxics standards—we call it MATS—which also required utilities to reduce their mercury emissions by 90 percent and other air toxic emissions by half.

Just as with the bill introduced by Senator ALEXANDER and me about a decade ago, many utilities claimed they could not meet those standards to reduce mercury and other air toxics. They predicted consumer rate spikes. They predicted mass powerplant closures. They predicted brownouts. They predicted blackouts. Luckily, those predictions were dead wrong. Under the 2012 MATS rule, the EPA determined it was appropriate and necessary to regulate air toxic plant emissions, like mercury, lead, arsenic, acid gases, and benzene, because of the health hazards of these pollutants. Today, believe it or