

Those descriptions evoke a gentle passage, a slow, almost comforting process of fading into history. And the term “lost coast” is equally off target. It’s like saying we misplaced a treasured item, or it was taken by an act of God.

None of those gentle things caused 2,000 square miles of marsh, swamp and uplands to become open water since the 1930s.

They were destroyed. By us.

And anyone who has spent time on the wet side of our levees—or has driven across the wetlands on elevated roadways—could see it wasn’t a gentle act.

This was a brutal assault, a battery, a vicious mugging. We used machines to dig up and toss aside marshes and cypress tupelo swamps to turn more than 10,000 miles (at last count) of our coastal zone into canals for barges to float drilling rigs, to lay tens of thousands of miles of pipelines for oil and gas, and to carve out shipping channels to make it easier and faster for boats to assist in the destruction. This was no gentle, whispering vanishing act; it was a noisy, diesel-fumed mauling of a pristine ecosystem we claim to love.

It was as violent and ugly to our homeland as the way companies eviscerated Western desert landscapes to strip mine for copper, or the way others dynamited entire Appalachian mountaintops—throwing their waste into adjacent streams—to make it easiest to harvest coal profits.

No one in Nevada or West Virginia says those deserts and mountains “disappeared” or “vanished.” They admit they were willfully destroyed.

Our ongoing embrace of these misleading euphemisms for what we did hides an even uglier aspect of this disaster: our silence. In many ways, this has been the Kitty Genovese of environmental crimes—because most of us stood by and did nothing even as the crime was being committed in front of us, then just walked silently away. We chose not to get involved because we were told it could cost us money.

Yes, levees on the rivers presaged the crimes, but those were unavoidable if we intended to live here. And 36 to 60 percent of what was destroyed—the portion researchers tie to oil and gas work—might still be here today if we had chosen another way.

Maybe we didn’t truly understand the systemic damage we were doing until the 1960s. But even then—even when the crime reports came out and the perpetrators were identified—we chose to look the other way.

Worse, we have taught the rest of the nation to join us in that deception. Google “Louisiana coast and disappearing,” and you’ll get 3.1 million hits. We have been so successful in this dissembling that our denial is now repeated regularly by journalists. The latest example is an in-depth New Yorker piece entitled “Louisiana’s Disappearing Coast”—which gave one sentence to the impact of those 10,000 miles of canals.

Indeed, our penchant for avoiding responsibility for our self-destruction extends to other another crime against our landscape and our children’s futures. Many of our politicians and residents now are ignoring or denying the mugging of the atmosphere by the emissions many of us help produce, emissions that are pushing the sea level rise acceleration that will send us to even earlier watery grave.

The only way to kick this deadly habit is to finally admit we have a problem.

So, let’s take the first step. Let’s look in the mirror and say to the people we see staring back that our coast isn’t disappearing or vanishing. It has been, and continues to be, willfully destroyed by our inaction—and we have no future here unless we kick that habit.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, after Baton Rouge, I went to the legendary city of New Orleans where I met with Mayor LaToya Cantrell. Around half of that city lives below sea level. Strong partnerships between the public and private sectors help make the city a national leader in resiliency planning.

In 2017, the city’s “Climate Action for a Resilient New Orleans” plan pledged to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by 2030. In March, New Orleans sued 11 oil, gas, and pipeline companies for damage to the wetlands that protect the city from storm surge and flooding.

Mayor Cantrell spoke to me about “learning to live with water” in the post-Katrina city. I visited community leaders in the recovering Lower Ninth Ward who are turning wetlands restoration projects in the area into education, community engagement, tourism, and other opportunities to rebuild a healthy connection between the city and the water that surrounds it.

I also met with a number of community leaders to discuss how businesses, nonprofits, researchers, and government agencies work together to save Louisiana’s working coastline. I heard from a business owner about a property he was having difficulty insuring due to anticipated flood risks.

I learned about the changes fishermen see in the gulf and how some of them have switched to nontraditional fisheries or changed careers completely. Hunters and recreational fishermen also notice worrying changes in their sportsmen’s paradise.

Though the evidence of climate change is everywhere in Louisiana and is reshaping the lives of Louisianans, the phrase “climate change” still brings apprehension in some circles.

Let me go back. This is us in the Ninth Ward, and here we are with some of the boats down at the fishing pier off of the Mississippi. I will describe a little bit more. This is the inlet that flows to Davis Pond, and it has brought water and sediment to the Davis Pond area.

You can’t see this very clearly, but these are white pelicans. I had never seen so many together in my life. It is rare for a Rhode Islander to see a white pelican. Here they pile in thick because the fish get drawn in coming off the river, and it makes a wonderful chow line. So there is a big population of white pelicans that have learned to show up this time of year and enjoy the chow line at this particular entry point.

I do want to say that although there is some hesitancy in talking about climate change in some quarters, some people are not hesitant, and I refer to the legendary Bob Marshall, who has described this as the “mugging of the atmosphere” by our emissions.

Having spoken with resiliency experts and seen Louisiana by both sky and in that terrific LSU model, I then took to the water to visit this restora-

tion work in action. This is Davis Pond here, and it was conceived as a freshwater diversion to push back saltwater intrusion into the marshes with counterpressure from added saltwater, but it turned out that it grew marshland, and it is now teaming with coastal wildlife and dozens of different bird species.

Here we are. We traveled in an airboat to get down there. I also visited hunter and fisherman Ryan Lambert at his lodge in Buras. He showed me some of his personal efforts to restore the delta and its wetlands. I am out here on his boat driving around the area that he has been working, pointing out how quickly, if you give nature a chance, she can rebound. A scientist with the National Wildlife Federation counted over 30 species of birds just while we were waiting to board the boat, and he spotted over 40 species while we were out on the water.

The sights and sounds of a healthy marsh were encouraging and a reminder of nature’s God-blessed ability to find a way to not only survive but flourish, given the chance.

Louisiana faces challenges ahead, but Louisianans are united in a David versus Goliath-scale battle to protect their State. To achieve that goal, I believe Louisiana must urge its fossil fuel tenants to accept responsibility for the climate crisis and commit to being part of the solution. Louisiana can be the crucible of compromise between the environment and the industry.

So thank you to all the wonderful advocates, researchers and community and State leaders I met in my visit to Louisiana. Thank you to Senator CASSIDY for his hospitality to me while I was down there. The dedication of the Louisianans I met to their coast is admirable and inspiring, and Louisiana’s coastal plan is a model for other coastal States.

I would also like to thank the senior Senator from Louisiana for welcoming me the way he did and for joining me here today. This is a big moment for me to have this be the first bipartisan “Time to Wake Up.” We share a commitment to giving our coast the respect, attention, and support they are due. I look forward to working together with Senator CASSIDY to find opportunities for our government to play its role in supporting our coastal resiliency and restoration.

Thank you, my friend.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. CASSIDY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the postcloture time on the Barker nomination expire at 11:45 a.m., Wednesday, May 1; I further ask that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, and the President be immediately notified of the Senate’s action.

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

## LEGISLATIVE SESSION

## MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. CASSIDY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

## TRIBUTE TO SANDY HART

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, every American has the solemn responsibility to show our gratitude to the brave men and women who have answered the call to serve our Nation in uniform. We have an obligation to honor the values for which they fought and praise their efforts to preserve the freedom of this great country and the world.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Allied invasion of the beaches of Normandy on D-Day. With every step onto the European continent, the forces of freedom moved closer to ending the reign of tyranny. Kentucky's World War II veteran community also marks another important milestone this year. Fifteen years ago, Sandy Hart, of Wickliffe, organized a groundbreaking project to honor the service of Kentucky's veterans. Because of Sandy's remarkable leadership, more than 500 World War II veterans traveled to our Nation's Capital in 2004 to visit the new memorial dedicated in their honor.

It is my privilege to recognize Sandy for her many years of dedicated service to American veterans, whom she calls true heroes. For many of the members of the Greatest Generation, a visit to the World War II Memorial in Washington, DC, simply wouldn't have been possible without her. Through more than a year and a half of hard work, Sandy, the daughter of a World War II veteran, collected the necessary donations to fill 17 busloads and give every veteran the chance to visit their memorial free of charge. Although shy by nature, she is animated by her passion for honoring veterans.

To foster greater understanding and appreciation of the sacrifice veterans made for this county, Sandy and her husband Ray established the Kentucky Veteran and Patriot Museum. With donations of both funds and memorabilia, Sandy hopes the museum can be a meaningful place of engagement and remembrance both for current veterans and for future generations. With focuses on each of the modern American military engagements, Sandy's museum pays tribute to the heroes who defended our Nation.

I am not the only one who admires Sandy for her tireless work in Kentucky. In his series of books entitled "Kentucky's Everyday Heroes: Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things," Steve Flairty profiled inspira-

tional men and women throughout the Commonwealth who, in his words, "go quietly about their daily living, making others' lives better, with little or no thoughts of personal benefit." Sandy's remarkable servant leadership clearly belongs among the ranks of these Kentuckians. Her inclusion in the book is a well-earned tribute to her lifetime spent in service to others.

To celebrate the 15th anniversary, the Wickliffe community will host a parade and a ceremony. They will also unveil new memorials to brave American veterans. This anniversary gathering is the latest opportunity for Kentuckians to honor our heroes that would be impossible without Sandy's committed vision. I am sure she would try to avoid the praise I am offering, but she deserves this and so much more. Sandy is an inspirational woman who has dedicated her life to the benefit of those around her, especially our veterans. So I hope my Senate colleagues will join me in marking this important anniversary and in thanking Sandy Hart for her extraordinary leadership honoring America's heroes.

## VACCINES

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that a copy of my opening statement at the Senate Health Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

## VACCINES SAVE LIVES

Mr. ALEXANDER. The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions will please come to order.

Senator Murray and I will each have an opening statement, and then we will introduce the witnesses. After the witnesses' testimony, senators will each have 5 minutes of questions.

It was not that long ago that, as a boy, I remember the terror in the hearts of parents that their children might contract polio and my classmates in iron lungs.

The Majority Leader, Senator McConnell, contracted polio when he was young. His mother took him to Warm Springs, because that is where President Roosevelt received treatment for polio. Fortunately, because of her dedication, Leader McConnell is able to walk today, but thousands of others were not as lucky.

Following the introduction of a vaccine in 1955, polio was eliminated in the United States in 1979, and since then, from every country in the world except for three. Polio is just one of the diseases we have eradicated in the United States thanks to vaccines.

Before the vaccine for measles was developed, up to four million Americans each year contracted the highly contagious, airborne virus.

In 2000, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) declared measles eliminated from the United States. And in 1980, smallpox was declared eradicated from the world by the CDC and the World Health Organization (WHO).

This is a remarkable demonstration of modern medicine.

Four years ago, this Committee held a hearing on vaccines, following the 2014 outbreak of measles—the worst outbreak since the disease was declared eliminated in 2000.

And even though 91.1 percent of Americans had been vaccinated for measles in 2017, according to the CDC, we continue to see outbreaks of this preventable disease because there are pockets in the United States that have low vaccination rates.

Last year, there were 372 cases of measles—the second highest number since 2000. And so far this year, there have been 159 cases reported and outbreaks confirmed in Washington State, New York, Texas, and Illinois.

We know that some Americans are hesitant about vaccines, so today I want to stress the importance of vaccines: not only has the Food and Drug Administration found them to be safe, but vaccines also save lives.

Vaccines have been so successful that, until recently, Americans have lived without fear of getting measles, polio, or rubella. We have made significant strides in improving vaccination rates.

In 2009, about 44 percent of Americans had received vaccines for seven preventable diseases: Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis, Polio, Measles, Mumps, and Rubella, Haemophilus influenzae type b, Hepatitis B, Chickenpox, and Pneumococcal, according to the CDC.

Today, over 70 percent of Americans are vaccinated against all seven of these diseases.

Vaccines protect not only those who have been vaccinated, but the larger community. This is called herd immunity.

There are some people who cannot be vaccinated—they are too young, or have a weak immune system because of a genetic disorder or are taking medicine that compromises their immune system, like cancer treatment.

Vaccines protect those who cannot be vaccinated by preventing the spread of diseases. However, low immunization rates can destroy a community's herd immunity.

While the overall vaccination rate nationwide is high enough to create this herd immunity, certain areas—the pockets of the country where vaccination rates are low—are vulnerable to outbreaks. There is a lot of misleading and incorrect information about vaccines that circulates online, including through social media.

Here is what I want parents in Tennessee, in Washington, in Texas, everywhere in our country to know: Vaccines are approved by the Food and Drug Administration, and meet the FDA's gold standard of safety. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices makes recommendations on the use of vaccines in the United States and annual child and adult vaccine schedules. This Advisory Committee is made up of medical doctors and public health professionals from medical schools, hospitals, and professional medical organizations from around the country. They are among the best our country has to offer and they have dedicated their lives to helping others. These recommendations are reviewed and approved by the CDC director, and are available on the CDC's website.

There is nothing secret about any of this science. Countless studies have been done to show that vaccines are safe. Charlatans and internet fraudsters who claim that vaccines aren't safe are preying on the unfounded fears and daily struggles of parents, and they are creating a public health hazard that is entirely preventable.

It is important for those who have questions about vaccines, especially parents, to speak with a reputable health care provider. As with many topics, just because you found it on the internet doesn't make it true.

The science is sound: Vaccines save lives—the lives of those who receive vaccines and the lives of those who are too young or vulnerable to be immunized.

Before I turn this over to Senator Murray, I want to add that the National Childhood