

So what do you think?

It is a mystery to all of us as to why the President is taking this action other than the fact that, of course, he did call on Russia in the last election and welcomed its support. We all saw him on national television when he did that.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Yes.

In fact, even the Mueller report showed that there was considerable Russian activity and support in the election that made Donald Trump our President. They couldn't prove an ongoing conspiracy between the Trump campaign and the Russian election interference effort, but they confirmed that there was a Russian election interference effort. If I recall correctly, they confirmed that the Trump campaign was witting of it, just not conspiring with it, just not directly engaged with it.

So I don't know. Perhaps it is just the hope that, perhaps, he will get elected again with foreign interference and that he doesn't want to close off that option, but it is a little bit odd for the President of the United States not to take the protecting of the security of the American election more seriously.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. I am glad Senator WHITEHOUSE made that distinction with respect to the Mueller report.

It is true that they did not find a criminal conspiracy, meaning they did not find some agreement between the Trump campaign and the Russians to interfere, but they found plenty of evidence of the Trump campaign's welcoming the intervention from the Russians.

Of course, we have more recently seen President Trump spreading the conspiracy theories that were launched by Vladimir Putin that it was not the Russians who interfered in the 2016 elections: Oh, my God. It was the Ukrainians who interfered in the 2016 elections.

There is this famous videotape now of Vladimir Putin's saying: Thank God, they are not blaming the Russians anymore. They are blaming the Ukrainians.

Translation: Thank God our propaganda is working, and even the President of the United States and some Members of the House of Representatives are parroting our conspiracy theory, the ones that we cooked up.

It is really alarming that a foreign government—someone like Vladimir Putin—is so successful in spreading its misinformation within our system.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I appreciate the concern of the Senator from Maryland on this, and I wish him success with his legislation.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. I thank the Senator for his questions.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

#### CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I come to again raise an alarm about the massive carbon pollution

that we are dumping into our natural world and to tell the stories of two ocean creatures that are suffering from that pollution. Now, we may mock or ignore these creatures—these lesser creatures so far down the food chain from us—but we are fools to ignore the message of what is happening to them.

Matthew 25:41 admonishes, “as you did it to one of the least of these . . . you did it to me.” So we ought not mock and ignore these lesser species because they also have a lesson for us, a warning. If we keep up what we are doing to them, it will soon enough be we who suffer. As Pope Francis warned: Slap Mother Nature, and she will slap you back.

Let's start, before we get to the two species, with an overview.

First, it is not just these two species. Science writer Elizabeth Kolbert has warned that we have entered a sixth great extinction—the first and only great extinction in humans' time on the planet—and that this great extinction is driven by manmade pollution and climate change. Scientists from around the globe have just issued one of the most comprehensive reports ever on Earth's biodiversity, and the head of that panel, Sir Robert Watson, summarized its findings this way.

I quote him here:

The overwhelming evidence . . . presents an ominous picture. The health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide.

The legendary David Attenborough warns that we face what he calls “irreversible damage to the natural world and the collapse of our societies.”

He says: “It may sound frightening, but the scientific evidence is that if we have not taken dramatic action within the next decade, we could face irreversible damage to the natural world and the collapse of our societies.”

In all of this, we need to remember our oceans. Oceans are warming and acidifying and literally suffocating ocean species as oxygen dead zones expand. Earth's oceans warm at the rate of multiple Hiroshima explosions' worth of heat per second—per second. They acidify at the fastest rate in at least 50 million years. They are also fouled with our plastic garbage and polluted by runoff from farming and stormwater. Our oceans' warnings are loud and clear and measurable. They are chronicled by fishermen and sailors and measured with thermometers, tide gauges, and simple pH tests that measure acidification.

It is this acidification that takes me to these two species. The oceans are absorbing around 30 percent of our excess carbon dioxide emissions, and they do that in a chemical interaction that takes up the CO<sub>2</sub> but acidifies the seawater. Don't pretend there is any dispute about this. Acidification is a chemical phenomenon. You can demonstrate it in a middle school science

lab. You can demonstrate it with your breath, an aquarium bubbler, a glass of water, and a pH strip. In fact, I have done so right at this desk.

Here is the first species pictured—the tiny pteropod. It is an oceanic snail about the size of a small pea. It is known as the sea butterfly because it has adapted two butterflylike wings that can propel it around in the ocean.

Acidifying waters make it harder for pteropods and a lot of other shelled creatures to grow their shells and develop from juveniles to adults. Researchers in the Pacific Northwest have reported what they called “severe shell damage” on more than half of the pteropods they collected from Central California to the Canadian border.

These images show the pteropod's shell when the creature's underwater environment becomes more acidic—not good for pteropods. Maintaining their shells against that acidity requires energy—energy that would otherwise go into growth or reproduction. So acidification makes it harder for species, such as the pteropods and other shell creatures at the base of the oceanic food chain, to survive.

Who cares? Who cares about the lowly, humble pteropod? Who cares about some stupid ocean snail? Well, for one, salmon do. Half the diet of some salmon species in the Pacific is pteropods. Salmon fisheries support coastal jobs and economies across our Pacific Northwest. Offshore fishing in the United States is a multibillion dollar industry connected to hundreds of thousands of livelihoods. If you care about our fisheries industry, you should care about the humble pteropod. An entire food chain stands on its tiny back, and we are in that food chain.

Move up the food chain a little, and you find another creature facing peril from acidification—the Dungeness crab. You see this crustacean on ice in your local fish market. It is an important commercial catch along our west coast. In 2014, the last year the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission did a comprehensive report, the Dungeness catch was worth \$170 million. It is Oregon's most valuable fishery, and it is important also for Washington State and for California, where annual landings run between \$40 and \$95 million. Up north, in 2017, Alaska's commercial landings of Dungeness crabs totaled more than 2.1 million pounds.

Last month, marine scientists reported that acidified oceans are dissolving the delicate shells of Dungeness crab larvae. The acidic environment is not just damaging the shells but also damaging the larvae's mechanoreceptors, the hairlike sensory organs that crabs use to hear and feel and make their way around the sea. The damage to the crabs is bad news, but worse is that we are seeing it now. Scientists thought hardy Dungeness crabs wouldn't be affected by acidification for decades. Richard Feely, senior NOAA scientist and coauthor of the study, reports that these “dissolution

impacts to the crab larvae . . . were not expected to occur until much later in this century."

The sentinel implications for the entire ecosystem are grave. If the Dungeness are feeling the effects of ocean acidification now, what other creatures are feeling those effects too? Another lead author of this study said: "If the crabs are affected already, we really need to make sure we start to pay much more attention to various components of the food chain before it is too late."

These concerns about the Dungeness crab and its happening too soon echo what scientists actually said of early findings about the pteropod. Oceanographer William Peterson, who is the co-author of an early study on the pteropod, said: "We did not expect to see pteropods being affected to this extent in our coastal region for several decades."

So we are way ahead of schedule in terms of what scientists have predicted for ocean acidification outcomes for these foundational creatures in our ocean ecosystem. Together, the pteropod and the Dungeness crab send a common message, one echoed by a Rhode Island fishing boat captain who told me: "Sheldon, things are getting weird out there."

And they are getting weird faster than expected. The rapid ocean acidification that we are measuring now and that we are causing now with further carbon pollution is nearly unprecedented in the geological record. Scientists look back to try to find historical analogs for what is happening. The closest historical analogs scientists can find for what they are seeing now in the oceans go back before human-kind. There is no analog in human time. You have to go back before humans existed, back into the prehistoric record, back to the prehistoric great extinctions, back when marine species were wiped out and ocean ecosystems took millions of years to recover. That is the historical analog that best matches our current direction.

In his encyclical "Laudato Si," Pope Francis, who is a trained scientist himself, reflected on what he called "the mysterious network of relations between things" in life. In that mysterious network of relations between things, the pteropod and the crab larva give their lives to transmit food energy from the microscopic plants they eat, which would be of no use to us, up to the fish that consume the pteropod and larva—fish, which we, in turn, consume—all in that great mysterious network of relations between things.

What is happening to these two species is more than just an event. It is a signal. It is a signal of a looming global ecological catastrophe. Lesser species, species that we may mock or ignore, can sometimes be sentinels for humans, like the legendary canaries taken down into coal mines. When the sentinels start to die, it is wise to pay attention.

What happens when, in our arrogance and pride, we refuse to heed the warnings from creatures so humble as the pteropods or crab larvae? Well, remember why Jesus was so angry with the Pharisees. What was their sin? Their arrogance and their pride blinded them to the truth. The Senate, this supposedly greatest deliberative body, has blinded itself to the devastation fossil fuels are unleashing on our Earth's mysterious network. We careen recklessly into the next great extinction.

Pope Francis says:

Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right.

Indeed, we have no such right.

So I come here today to challenge us to see the damage we have done—the damage we are doing now, today, to this mysterious network of life, this mysterious God-given network of life that supports us. I challenge us also to turn away from dark forces of corruption and greed—specifically, the fossil fuel industry forces that have deliberately, on purpose, crippled our ability in Congress to stop their pollution.

I close by challenging us to heed the message of the humble creatures sharing this planet with us—the least of us, who share God's creation. They suffer at our hands, and in their suffering they send us a message, a warning, that we would do well to hear.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

## LEGISLATIVE SESSION

### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for 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.

### LITHUANIAN INDEPENDENCE

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, when one looks at a largely unified and democratic Europe, today it is easy to forget just how different it was in Eastern Europe not that long ago. For half a century, millions lived under the tyranny and repression of the Soviet Union.

But in the late 1980s, things began to change, particularly in the Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Who can forget when 2 million people joined hands across these three

nations to form the 420-mile Baltic Chain of Freedom in August 1989? And not long after in February of the following year, Lithuania held its first free elections since World War II, voting for the country's first postwar non-Communist government. Immediately thereafter, the new Parliament voted to make Lithuania the first occupied Soviet republic to declare independence. Lithuania's bold move was followed later that year by Latvia and Estonia. These brave efforts culminated a year later in February 1991, when the Lithuania people overwhelmingly voted for independence—a historic move recognized by the US and Soviet Union that same year.

My first visit to Lithuania was nearly 40 years ago, but my ties reach back even further. One hundred years ago, my grandmother left her village of Jubarkas with her three small children to join my grandfather in America. In her arms, she carried a 2-year-old toddler—my mother, Ona Kutkaite.

Hidden in my grandmother's baggage was a small Catholic prayer book, printed in Vilnius in 1863, the last year before printing in Lithuanian was outlawed by the czars. That prayer book—the last, cherished relic of my family's life in their beautiful and ancient home—escaped the czars and was kept safe with our family in America during the brutal Soviet occupation. When I had the honor of addressing the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania on the 20th anniversary of independence, I was proud to bring that prayer book home to a free Lithuania. Those brave Lithuanians 30 years ago—including my friend Vytautas Landsbergis, who served as Lithuanian's first post-independence head of state—led the country to a prosperous and democratic future.

Lithuania today is a vital member of the European Union, NATO, and the community of democracies. It held the presidency of the European Union earlier this decade and is a leading voice on the continent for standing up to Russia, defending Ukraine, and upholding key democratic values. And as it faces renewed threats from Russia, I have been a strong supporter of strengthening NATO operations and defenses in the Baltic nations. A few years ago, I visited the Lithuanian town of Rukla, where U.S. and German forces were rotating through as part of the European Reassurance Initiative aimed at keeping the Baltic safe.

As the cochair of the Senate Baltic Caucus, I will be introducing a resolution in the weeks ahead reaffirming this security cooperation and recognizing Lithuania's great achievements around its 30th anniversary of independence.

In February 1990, when I came to Lithuania as part of an American delegation to observe the historic elections, my friends took me inside the Seimas to show me the arsenal of the Lithuanian freedom fighters. In the corner stood a handful of old rifles—no