

one of their main arguments against President Trump was that he mishandled the COVID-19 pandemic.

I know and you know that hindsight is 20/20. We know that the public health guidance provided by the CDC has evolved over time. We have learned a lot since then. But they were more interested in the blame game to advance their political cause in the runup to the November 3 election than they were in actually trying to help the very people who sent us here to represent them, and I think it is just shameful.

#### TERRORISM

On another matter, over the last 4 years, our country has made serious progress in the decades-long fight against terrorism and to lay the foundation for peace and stability in the Middle East.

We have virtually wiped out the ISIS caliphate, which was the most recent manifestation of this poisonous ideology embraced by al-Qaida that led to the attacks on 9/11. We have brought down high-ranking terrorists like al-Baghdadi, and we have eliminated the head of the Quds Force, the IRGC in Iran, that is the No. 1 state sponsor of terrorism in the world—Mr. Soleimani.

We have actually strengthened our relationship with allies in the region, like Israel and Jordan, and taken a tougher approach on a unified basis against enemies like Iran. And the recent Abraham Accords Peace Agreement marked a historic step in normalizing relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

There is no question in my mind that the world is safer today than it was 4 years ago because of the historic progress that we have made, not only against terrorists but to provide the foundation of peace and stability in the Middle East by encouraging Israel and its neighbors to work together where they can.

But our job is not finished. Dangerous and destabilizing forces still remain, and America's military continues to play a vital role.

I personally appreciated General Mattis's doctrine of fighting terrorists by, with, and through our allies on the ground. That meant that we didn't need to put hundreds of thousands of American soldiers and marines, Special Forces on the ground. We could work through and with our allies, and that was largely successful at eliminating the ISIS threat in the Middle East.

So I was alarmed by Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller's announcement today that without any real consultation either with our allies at NATO or elsewhere—certainly not with Congress—the Pentagon plans to withdraw troops from Afghanistan and Iraq to a potentially unstable and dangerous level.

I happen to be a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and one of the things our military does in forward-deployed locations like the Middle East is provide enabling and force

protection for our intelligence officers, who quietly work without any particular attention, hopefully. That is the nature of their work. But they need the military to be there to provide that force protection if they need it to enable their important work.

So a precipitous retreat, which would reverse the progress we have made and fought so hard to make, I think, is deeply troubling.

If we have learned one thing, it is about—maybe you call it the—I don't know if you call it the physics of military conflict or leadership, but history has taught us that power vacuums are not often filled by the good guys. It is the tyrants, it is the thugs, it is the dictators, it is the terrorists who fill those power vacuums, and if we mistakenly, even with the best of intentions, create a power vacuum, we could see once again the rise of ISIS like we saw with President Obama's premature withdrawal from Iraq.

We simply need to learn from our experience and not make the same mistake again. A precipitous withdrawal would not empower our allies. Indeed, we have heard from some of those allies. For example, NATO—the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—has a significant number of troops in these areas that are providing training and support for our friends on the ground.

It could well give rise to an opportunity for our adversaries—to the terrorists and insurgents who would love nothing more than to see American troops packing their bags so they could claim that they have defeated the Great Satan, as some of them have referred to it.

We would also, I think, cause our allies to question our reliability, while unintentionally, perhaps, emboldening our enemies and jeopardizing the lives of civilians in the region.

So I think we need to have a conversation here. We need to have a consultation. We need to get the military leaders before the appropriate committees in the Senate so that we can ask questions and understand the process and what the end goal is, particularly this close to the close of this administration's current term of office.

I understand the desire to bring our troops home. But in doing so, we can't undermine the gains that they and thousands of other brave Americans have made in the fight against terrorism and those who would do us harm.

#### E-CIGARETTES

Mr. President, on another matter, I have said here on the Senate floor many times over the last several months that COVID-19 is the most urgent threat facing our country right now. But as I just got through saying, it is not the only one.

Both here and abroad, the same threats and challenges that existed before COVID-19 are still with us and may have been exaggerated by the current crisis. I spoke about one example here on the Senate floor yesterday—

the strain on mental health resources. The stresses this virus are taking on our people—on the American people—are serious, as many cope with isolation, health anxieties, job losses, and financial struggles.

We are seeing a correlation with another health crisis that has been exacerbated by COVID-19. Last fall, one of the biggest health threats making headlines was the nationwide use of e-cigarettes by our young people. Folks of all ages were experiencing a range of mysterious medical conditions linked to these devices, with vaping-related injuries reported in all 50 States. What is most concerning to me is that most of those affected were otherwise healthy children and teens.

I met one of those teenagers in Fort Worth last December when I visited the University of North Texas Health Science Center for a roundtable discussion on the use of e-cigarettes. Sixteen-year-old Anna Carey was one of the many students at her high school who became addicted to e-cigarettes. She started to see symptoms that are uncommon for an otherwise healthy teenager. She was extremely lethargic and would experience random and severe pains in her chest.

Two initial x rays came back clear, so doctors released her, but she continued to struggle. Eventually, she was admitted to Cook Children's Hospital and diagnosed with chemical-induced pneumonia in both of her lungs.

Well, I am glad to report that Anna has now fully recovered and is using her story to encourage more teens not to go down the same path that she traveled down.

Now, with the additional public health concern of COVID-19, the need for action to prevent children and teens from using these devices could not be higher.

When it comes to the coronavirus, we know those who are older or who have underlying health conditions are most likely to experience severe cases. But there is a recent study by researchers at Stanford University School of Medicine that looked at the connection between vaping and COVID-19 among young people.

Researchers found that those who use e-cigarettes were five to seven more times likely to be diagnosed than nonusers. Dr. Bonnie Halpern-Felsher is a professor of pediatrics and the senior author of the study. She said: "Teens and young adults need to know that if you use e-cigarettes, you are likely at immediate risk of COVID-19 because you are damaging your lungs."

Now, one of the simplest and most effective ways to discourage children and teens from becoming addicted to these devices is to prevent them from even trying in the first place. But, unfortunately, our current laws make that easier said than done.

If you want to buy tobacco at a convenience store or gas station, you have to show an ID to prove you are over 18. So whether a teen is trying to buy e-

cigarettes or traditional cigarettes, the same guardrails are in place.

But there are two different sets of rules when it comes to online purchases. For traditional cigarettes, the buyer has to sign and show an ID at the time of delivery, just the same as they would have to do for in-person purchases. But e-cigarettes are operating on a different playing field. Anyone, no matter how old or young, can go online and buy e-cigarettes and have them delivered to their front door, no questions asked—no age verification is required, no ID, no nothing.

These devices, we know, are just as addictive and dangerous as traditional cigarettes and should be subject to the same restrictions. That is why the Senate passed legislation that Senator FEINSTEIN from California and I introduced called the Preventing Online Sales of E-Cigarettes to Children Act. This legislation would put in place the same safeguards for e-cigarettes as traditional cigarettes purchased online. It is not to change the law; it is just to make sure we enforce the existing law. It would require online retailers to verify the age of the customer and release deliveries only to adults with an ID. Again, it simply applies the same safeguards already in place for online purchases of regular cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products to e-cigarettes.

These are commonsense, straightforward reforms, and that is why our legislation in the Senate passed unanimously this summer.

It includes an amendment offered by our colleague from Kentucky, Senator PAUL, which requires the National Institutes of Health to conduct a study on the short- and long-term health impact of e-cigarettes on those under 21.

When we talk about passing consensus legislation, this is about as simple and straightforward as they come, and there could not be a more important time to take action. If we are going to turn the tide on e-cigarettes and prevent more young people from facing the deadly health consequences, this is an important and necessary step. This bipartisan bill would keep e-cigarettes out of the hands of our children, and I hope our House Democratic colleagues will pass this critical legislation without additional delay.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

#### CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, it is timely that I should be giving my "Time to Wake Up" speech with the distinguished Senator from Louisiana presiding because I am going to be talking about sea level rise, and seeing him in the chair reminds me of a recent report on what sea level rise is doing to the great State of Louisiana, "the sportsman's paradise," in which a scientist from Tulane University—a Tulane University geologist—was asked about the report about what the State had to look forward to from sea level rise, and he said: "What it says is

we're screwed." NOLA, the news website in New Orleans, in Louisiana, ran that headline. So I know the Senator is sympathetic to it.

But today, all eyes are on Georgia, which for the first time in generations voted for a Democratic Presidential candidate, and the two Senate races are headed for runoff elections, which will decide the balance of power in this body.

Georgians of every race and background turned out to reject the politics of fear and division that came from the White House for the last 4 years and to reject the disdain for facts and science that has cost Americans so much in battles like COVID and climate change.

Perhaps buried in the election outcome in Georgia was Georgia's knowing the threat of climate change. For people along Georgia's coast, climate change is no Chinese hoax; it is a clear and present danger.

In the spring of 2014, I took a climate trip along the coast of the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. I met with scientists and students, outdoorsmen, faith leaders, and State and local officials, who cherish their coastal communities, as Louisianans do and as Rhode Islanders do. They saw the seas rising and acidifying due to carbon pollution. Georgians told me how deeply they care about their coast. That caring has powered them through some tough battles. They fought hard against fossil fuel development off Georgia's shores, and they won.

It is not hard to understand why Georgians fight for their coasts against fossil fuel pollution. Near Savannah, I visited Fort Pulaski and Tybee Island. NOAA has a tide gauge at Fort Pulaski. It has been measuring sea level since 1935. The tide gauge takes straightforward measurements—clear, irrefutable facts. That tide gauge showed sea levels up over 8 inches since it was installed. For low-lying areas, those 8 inches of sea level rise are a problem already, but it is going to get worse.

Climate change worsens coastal flooding in two ways. First, it raises the level of the sea as glaciers and ice sheets melt into the sea and as warmer oceans expand. Second, climate change powers up stronger and more frequent hurricanes, which send those higher seas as higher storm surges farther inland. So it is important to look at how far and how often sea level rise and storm surges will flood coastal areas.

This is the map of Georgia's coastal area around Savannah. Here is Savannah. Here is the coastline. Here is the ocean. Here is Tybee Island. This dot here is Fort Pulaski, where the tide gauge is. That is what it looks like now, but "now" is not going to stay because here is what Georgia has coming at it.

Based on NOAA information, this is the risk of flooding along the Georgia coast. It takes NOAA's intermediate prediction of sea level rise—"inter-

mediate" meaning it is not the most extreme scenario; it is the midrange prediction—and it shows the risk in any year of a 4-foot-deep flood.

So here we are in 2020, and the risk is negligible. It is about 3 percent, meaning in present circumstances, you get a 4-foot flood through that area every 33 years. But by 2040, the risk is over 40 percent, which means that a 4-foot flood in that area is now not happening every 33 years, it is happening virtually every other year. By 2060, you hit 100 percent. You are getting a 4-foot flood in coastal Georgia every year. Of course this tops out at one flood per year based on the percentages, but if you look at this trajectory, clearly we are headed for multiple 4-foot floods per year in the outyears.

When I was on Tybee Island, I met city councilman Paul Wolff, who showed me the city of Tybee's new stormwater tide gate, which they just installed to protect the island from sea level rise. He explained that the road out to Tybee Island, which is here, running along that edge, flooded already 45 times per year with just 1 foot of sea level rise.

The city had already put in place a short-term plan for 14 to 20 inches of sea level rise by 2060. They were already thinking what the community would need to do as seas rise and acting on the best science back at that time. But now consider this: Consider sea level rise and storm surges combining to produce a 4-foot flood every year, at least once a year.

Here is what that map looks like when you put 4 feet of water there. This is the Savannah area, and here is Tybee Island. This is all land in gray, and now all of this is underwater. Tybee Island has turned into just a tiny little atoll, basically, out in the ocean. The road that I was talking about is now not just occasionally washed over with water; for 5 miles, that road is underwater.

Now, 4 feet of flooding happening every year is obviously bad, but remember, that wasn't the worst-case scenario; that was the intermediate NOAA scenario.

Here is an extreme case—10 feet of sea level rise. That was Tybee Island. There is nothing left. Do you want an island now? Your island is Savannah—Savannah Island, surrounded by water.

Well before the physical disaster of sea level rise and storm surge and flooding happens, something else comes first: an economic disaster, because we are not the only people looking at these projections of 4 feet and 10 feet of flooding. So do insurance companies. So do banks selling mortgages.

In these populated areas that are now land, how do you insure against a 4-foot flood that will happen every year? You can't buy a flood insurance policy for an event that happens every year. How do you get a 30-year mortgage for a property that will have flooded at least 30 times by the end of the mortgage? That economic punch—when you