

years and sometimes die there. Nobody even mentions their name. Would you consider coming to the floor of the Senate and saying something, perhaps writing a letter to the Embassy of the country where they are being held prisoner?

I was skeptical as to whether or not that would even be worth the effort, but I have learned over the years it is. I have come to the Senate floor to raise the cases of political prisoners around the world, typically journalists or activists who found themselves jailed for defending basic freedoms we take for granted.

In some cases, with the help of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, we have seen the release of some of these prisoners. Others still languish.

I bring their pictures to the floor because mentioning their names is important, but seeing them tells a story too. Raif Badawi and Waleed Abulkhair, in Saudi Arabia, and interim Venezuelan President Guaido's chief of staff Roberto Marrero continue to languish unjustly in prison. We continue to press for their release.

I always thought that trying to secure the release of political prisoners was worthwhile because it spoke to our values as Americans. I have had a chance to meet some of them after they were released.

It is an amazing feeling after someone has spent years—literally years—in prison and comes to my office in the Capitol and breaks down in tears in gratitude. It reminds me that they shouldn't be forgotten, and neither should many others.

Unfortunately, this President is too comfortable with these autocratic leaders who imprison people around the world. I wish he weren't.

That brings me to the Philippines, one of our key democratic allies in Asia. Over the Christmas break, I thought my friends were joking with me when they came to me and said: Well, I guess you will not be going to the Philippines soon. I didn't know what they were talking about.

It turns out that in my home State, in Illinois, there are many Filipino Americans. It is one of the largest immigrant groups coming to our country. What an incredible population Filipino Americans are. As I have come to know them, they have strong family values and strong religious values, and they are hard-working folks. They open these little shops and sit in them for 16 hours or 18 hours a day because that is the way an immigrating Filipino sets the stage for their son and daughter to have a better life.

Over the holiday recess, the President of the Philippines, President Duterte, announced that he was banning Senator PATRICK LEAHY of Vermont, as well as myself and Senator ED MARKEY of Massachusetts, from ever visiting the Philippines. I was kind of shocked to see that. I didn't expect that.

What precipitated this reaction? He also, incidentally, threatened to re-

strict the travel of all Americans to the Philippines. For some time, several of us, including Senator LEAHY and Senator MARKEY, have been advocating for the release of Filipina Senator Leila de Lima. Senator de Lima was a former head of the National Human Rights Commission of the Philippines and an internationally recognized human rights champion critical of President Duterte's extrajudicial killings.

What did that lead to? Her arrest and her being sentenced and imprisoned for up to 3 years in jail for speaking out against the current President of the Philippines.

Here is a photo of her being taken to court after she was arrested a little over 3 years ago.

Who is behind her release? Not just Senators LEAHY, DURBIN, and MARKEY and many of our colleagues, but also Amnesty International, the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, and the Raoul Wallenberg Center.

Let me read an excerpt from the letter she sent me.

As you can imagine, I may be the one currently in detention, but I am not the only victim suffering in this situation . . . so are the victims of extrajudicial killings and their families, so are all defenders of human rights . . . and ultimately, so are all of us all over the world who defend democracy and rule of law.

Senator MARKEY has a resolution calling for Senator de Lima's release and an end to the harassment of Filipina journalist Maria Ressa, which I am proud to cosponsor and hope will pass the Senate soon.

Last year, Senator LEAHY joined me in an amendment to the State and Foreign Operations bill, denying U.S. visas to those involved in Senator de Lima's politically motivated incarceration. It was our little measure in that appropriations bill that led President Duterte to ban us from ever traveling to the Philippines. There is an easy and honorable way forward. The Duterte regime should stop threatening the travel of Filipino Americans and so many others who travel between our nations and, instead, ensure a quick and credible trial for Senator de Lima or simply do the right thing and release her.

In the end, her freedom and the end of government harassment of journalists like Maria Ressa will be important tests of whether the cherished democratic norms we share with our long-standing Filipino allies will be respected by President Duterte.

#### UNITED STATES-MEXICO-CANADA TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. President, trade agreements are controversial. They come before the Senate and the House infrequently and are usually very hard to pass. It takes months and months of work. One of those trade agreements, which is known as the USMCA, or the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or NAFTA 2.0, is one that I have watched carefully. I voted for the original

NAFTA agreement when I was a Member of the House of Representatives. It was not a popular vote among many people in Illinois, but I felt that it was the right thing to do. I felt that moving the Mexican economy forward, watching it mature, with the creation of a middle class, would mean that it would be a more stable nation and a nation that would consume many goods produced in the United States.

That happened, but it happened at an expense, too, to be very honest. Many companies in the United States saw the low wage rates in Mexico, closed their plants in places like Galesburg, IL, and moved operations to Mexico. Some moved to China and other places.

That displacement of jobs was painful. It was hard to explain to families that this was a transition that ultimately was for the good of all nations involved. If it was your family, you didn't care about the good of a nation. You wanted to know if dad had a job.

The pain we went through over the last 25 years led me into this conversation about the USMCA with some skepticism. I didn't want to be behind any effort that would ultimately result in more American jobs being lost unnecessarily. I am proud to say that this negotiation, unlike many things in this town, turned out to be a bipartisan success.

President Trump presented us with an original version of the USMCA, and many of us took exception to some of its contents. I was particularly worried about one provision in there relating to the price of prescription drugs and some other provisions in the original measure. Then, a fulsome negotiation took place. Democrats and Republicans sat down. The net result was a positive thing. Just this last week, the Senate Finance Committee reported this USMCA by a vote of 25 to 3. I believe this bill—this new measure, this new NAFTA—enjoys broad bipartisan support.

This morning, I went on a conference call with the agriculture leaders of Illinois. I am proud to say we have one of the strongest agricultural States in the Nation and some of the best women and men who farm our land and produce food and fiber for people to consume all across America and around the world. They have gone through some very tough times. The President's trade problems with China have hurt us especially. Our soybean producers have seen a 93-percent decline in their exports of soybeans and soybean products from the State of Illinois. They have paid heavily for the decision in this administration to cut back on renewable fuels and to issue waivers to oil companies so they don't have to blend them in the fuel they sell us at gas stations.

They have seen the decline in the net foreign income, an increase in foreign debt, and we have sent aid payments to them, which they reluctantly accept as just the only lifeline they have to keep their farms in the family.

They are happy to see that we are moving forward on this new trade agreement. A new NAFTA—the USMCA—means the top trading partners of the State of Illinois, Mexico and Canada, will have a new lease on a relationship that can improve as we increase trade among our nations. The three nations will prosper. Our bounty, which we produce in the farmlands of Illinois, will be shared with Mexico, Canada, and many nations far beyond them. It is a step forward for us.

I am glad it was done on a bipartisan basis, and I am particularly happy to see the overwhelming majority of labor organizations in my State of Illinois and in the Nation support the USMCA. It is great to have both labor and business and farm communities together in this effort.

It is far from perfect. This is a bill that moves in the right direction, and I hope we bring it up for consideration and a vote very soon on the floor of the Senate.

#### E-CIGARETTES

Mr. President, for many years, I have had a battle on with the tobacco lobby. It is personal. I lost my father to lung cancer when I was 14 and he was 53. I watched and stood by his bedside for literally 100 days as he languished and ultimately died from lung cancer. He smoked two packs of cigarettes a day.

When I came to the U.S. House of Representatives, I was determined to try to do something about the deaths that were being caused by tobacco products across America. I proposed a measure, which seemed pretty modest at the time, that banned smoking on airplane flights. It was an inconvenience and a mess to get on a plane with the so-called smoking and nonsmoking sections. So I thought: Let's get rid of it once and for all.

It was quite a battle in the House of Representatives. We passed it by a handful of votes, to ban smoking on airplanes. Luckily, I found a great colleague and friend, former Senator Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey, who took up the cause on the floor of the Senate, and we banned smoking on airplanes over 25 years ago.

I didn't know that it was anything more than elimination of an inconvenience while people took airplane flights. It turned out to be much more. It turned out to be a tipping point. People across America said: If it is unhealthy to breathe in second-hand smoke on an airplane, how about trains? How about buses? How about offices? How about hospitals? How about restaurants?

At the end of the day, we know what happened. If someone walked into your home or your place of business and lit up a cigarette, you would look at them and think: Where are you from? We don't do that anymore.

We certainly don't do it without asking permission. But that is what has happened in America.

We had to fight the tobacco lobby every step of the way, and we have had

some success. The number of young people who were using tobacco cigarette products declined dramatically, from over 20 percent to around 8 percent. We were winning the battle because these tobacco companies were recruiting our kids at an early age with a nicotine addiction they couldn't shake later in life.

Guess what happened. The tobacco companies invented a new product that is called e-cigarette, or vaping. If you think I am making this connection up, take a look at the largest vendor of vaping devices, JUUL, and look at the major shareholder of JUUL. It turns out to be Altria, which also turns out to be a major tobacco company.

Now the tobacco companies have decided that since kids don't gravitate toward tobacco cigarettes, they will give them an alternative. The alternative is an e-cigarette, or a vaping device.

You know what has happened, Mr. President, in your State and in my mine? High school kids are taking up this vaping addiction in numbers unimaginable. The latest report suggests that almost 29 percent of high school students across the United States are currently vaping. What they are doing is using pods and flavor pods with nicotine included and using an electronic device to inhale this vapor and blow it out. Unfortunately, in inhaling it into their lungs, they are also inhaling nicotine and developing a terrible addiction.

Students from New York came to my office a few weeks ago, and they said: Senator, don't kid yourself. It is not 28 or 29 percent. It is over 50 percent of students who are vaping today, and they are desperate to buy these flavor pods and to buy these new JUUL devices. When the teacher in a classroom steps out, they are all vaping, right there in the classroom. They do it in the restrooms and the classrooms and the cafeterias and outside the schools. They are doing desperate things to be able to afford these devices.

On September 11 of this year, President Trump and the First Lady held a press conference in the Oval Office. Though I have been critical of this President for many things, I applauded what they said. They recognized this vaping crisis, and they said that we are going to stop it and that we are going to make the moves necessary to make sure that these flavor pods that are enticing children are finally taken from the market.

I couldn't believe my ears when I heard it. Here was President Trump stepping up to do the right thing. Perhaps he and his wife, as a father and a mother of a teenager, understand this better than some. But whatever the reason, whatever the motivation, they came forward with what I thought was the best proposal: End the flavor pods once and for all.

After they made their announcements, the vaping industry went to work. They started buying ads on

FOX—naturally, that is where the President watches television—and they started saying to the people that it was unfair to take away these flavor pods.

Sadly, these flavor pods, when you look at them very closely, are just an enticement for young people to use this product.

Now the vaping industry tries to argue: Well, wait a minute. People who want tobacco cigarettes ought to have vaping as an alternative. It is safer.

Well, marginally it may be, if that were the end of the story. But it turns out that vaping device is also becoming an enticement for young people to use flavor pods and to develop this addiction to nicotine of vaping devices. It is impossible to argue that some veteran smoker of tobacco products is going to be enticed to vaping if he can buy candy flavors, bubble gum flavors, fruit flavors, or other flavors. Can you imagine some 50-year-old who has been smoking Marlboro for years, and says: Man, if I could just get my hands on some Unicorn milk flavor pods, I would give up tobacco and move to e-cigarettes.

We know better. These pods are designed to entice children.

(Mr. ROMNEY assumed the chair.)

We waited to see what would happen after the President's September announcement. We were lucky to have one of our own colleagues, from the State of Utah, who has now taken the Chair, who was present at the meeting with the President on the issue of vaping. I salute him for his friendship and leadership on this issue.

Last week, after delays, President Trump finally announced a plan to ban some of the e-cigarette flavors that are hooking our kids on nicotine. Within 30 days, some flavored e-cigarette pods and cartridges will be removed from the market. This is an important step, but it is not nearly enough. For instance, menthol pods are exempt, so I am afraid kids are just going to move to JUUL's menthol flavor. Further, liquid e-cigarette flavors that are used in open-tank vaping shops are also exempt. The vaping shops are still in business, unaffected by this new policy of the administration. Liquid nicotine is sold in flavors like Gummy Bear, Whip Cream, Sugar Cookie, and Unicorn Milk. These flavors, definitely intended for kids, will stay under President Trump's new policy.

This week's announcement is not what the President said would happen in the Oval Office a few months ago. That is why the public health community and this Senator are so disappointed. We know the President decided to water down the e-cigarette flavor ban. Heavy lobbying by Big Tobacco and Big Vape were behind it. When announcing this new restriction, President Trump said some words that may tell the story. He said:

We have to protect our families. At the same time, it's a big industry. We want to protect the industry.

Protect the vaping industry? It makes sense why these companies