

I see it in Colorado every week: neighbors showing up to help each other, protecting each other, sharing what they have—food, childcare, a bed to sleep in—even when they don't have that much themselves. It is that spirit that gives me hope for my children's future and yours. It is the American spirit. It is the spirit that this administration can't defund, can't destroy.

Here is my promise to Colorado and to our country—one that can't be broken: If you are willing to roll up your sleeves and take on the tough fights, there is no peril, no problem, no President that we can't overcome.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

#### CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, today marks the 308th time that I have stood on the Senate floor and asked my colleagues to wake up to the realities of climate change.

This also marks 308 times that my Republican colleagues have ignored my call to wake up. They even refuse to acknowledge the simple truths that the climate is changing, oceans are warming, sea levels are rising, and our fossil fuel emissions are the principal cause.

In the last several weeks, Republicans have sent someone to the floor to object each time I sought unanimous consent to pass a resolution affirming these very simple truths.

The Senate's record of failure profoundly disappoints me. In fact, it angers me. I am angry on behalf of the homeowners in Florida, Louisiana, back home in Rhode Island, and across the country who are paying double or triple what they used to for property insurance because climate risk is making floods, storms, and wildfires more frequent and severe.

I am angry that these same families are paying more than ever for groceries due to increasingly frequent and severe droughts, heat waves, floods, and storms.

This is a tragedy. But, worse, it is a preventable tragedy. Ignoring it will not make climate change go away; it will leave Americans poorer and American communities more vulnerable and less prepared.

America can do big things. Our history shows that. And I believe a challenge of the magnitude of climate change justifies congressional action.

So here I still am, speaking because I still believe in the power of this body to take action, to serve the people whom we took an oath to serve, and to use the awesome power that our constituents have granted us to solve the greatest problems facing our country today.

This is a significant anniversary. Republican Senator John Chafee, whose distinguished career in the Senate spanned from 1976 to 1999, and who also served as Governor of my State and Secretary of the Navy, shared my belief.

On a note of personal disclosure, when he and my father both came back from World War II as marines from the Pacific theater, they ended up as roommates in college. So there is some personal family affection there, as well as professional appreciation.

Well, exactly 40 years ago this week, while serving as chair of the Senate Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Environmental Pollution, Senator Chafee convened a 2-day, 5-panel hearing on the greenhouse effect, climate change, and ozone depletion. Senator Chafee believed Congress had a role in addressing both the hole in the ozone layer and the rising temperatures and global disruptions caused by climate change.

The 1986 Chafee hearing witnesses included scientists and policymakers—among them, Dr. James Hansen, who went on to become a leading advocate for decisive climate action and served NASA with great distinction; Dr. Michael Oppenheimer, later an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change participant and Nobel prize recipient; and even then-Senator Al Gore of Tennessee. Also testifying were President Reagan's EPA Administrator, Lee Thomas, and his Commerce Deputy Secretary, Clarence Brown.

In Senator Chafee's opening remarks, he warned of what he called two "critical problems facing the world." First was "the growing use of manmade chemicals" that were significantly depleting the ozone layer, and second was the "buildup of greenhouse gases, which threaten to warm the Earth to unprecedented levels."

Those problems had to be addressed, Senator Chafee warned 40 years ago, because—and I will continue with his words here—"there is a very real possibility that man—through ignorance or indifference, or both—is irreversibly altering the ability of our atmosphere to perform basic life support functions for the planet."

He asked the scientists to educate the public on the scientific consensus on ozone depletion and climate change, and he urged the government officials to take immediate action to, as he said, "put the brakes on" these looming crises and ensure a livable planet for future generations. Notably, Ronald Reagan's appointees acknowledged the climate crisis and agreed to take action.

This is not the first time I have brought this graph to the Senate floor. This is the so-called Keeling Curve, well known in science circles. This chart shows the change in carbon dioxide concentration in the Earth's atmosphere. As you can see, it has accelerated rapidly since 1950.

Last month, the Member whom the Republicans sent to the floor to object to my statement of the science made the point that CO<sub>2</sub> levels have naturally fluctuated over many, many years of geologic time. Well, yeah, that is true.

Here is what that looks like. This is 800,000 years ago—800,000 years ago. For

the last 800,000 years, the carbon concentration in the atmosphere has never gone above 300 parts per million. It has varied up and down. But something very, very different happened when our Industrial Revolution began and we started emitting massive amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, like methane, into the atmosphere. There it is—up like a rocket. The notion that this can be explained by that is just plain preposterous.

This is also not the first time I have come to the floor to speak about the 1986 Chafee hearings. I did so 10 years ago, in 2016, to mark those hearings' 30th anniversary. Then, as now, I reflected not only on the reality of climate science, which is virtually undisputed except among those on fossil fuel's payroll, and the climate costs that have accrued since 1986. But I also spoke about the shocking transformation of the Republican Party from the 1980s to today.

In June of 1986, a Republican Senator, concerned by the same data that I am sharing with you now, committed to immediate and urgent action. He directed a panel of Ronald Reagan-appointed officials to outline their plans to address the crisis, and they did so. At that time, the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere was approximately 348 parts per million.

In June of 2016, when I recognized the 30th anniversary of this hearing, the fossil fuel billionaire-backed Supreme Court had just stayed the Clean Power Plan, EPA's first-ever attempt to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from powerplants. Then-Candidate Donald Trump promised to rescind the Clean Power Plan when he got into office, and the U.S. House of Representatives voted to officially denounce a carbon price. They went to bat to protect the freedom to pollute for their fossil fuel donors.

In 2016, the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> had climbed from 348 parts per million to 404 parts per million. These are measurements, by the way, not opinions.

Today, President Trump, approaching the halfway point of his second term, calls climate change a "hoax." Hoax. His EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin rescinded EPA's greenhouse gas endangerment finding—an action flatly at odds with known science and with the law—and then celebrated what he called "driving a dagger straight into the heart of the climate change religion." Really.

And to bring things full circle, earlier this spring, 40 years after a senior Reagan administration Commerce official acknowledged the reality of climate change, today's Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, a strident opponent of affordable renewable energy, denies the science. The Republican Party steps backward.

Today, as I speak, the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere is north of 430 parts per million—348, up to 404, and

now up to 430. In just four decades, atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration has increased by nearly 25 percent due to fossil fuel combustion.

As climate deniers are fond of pointing out, CO<sub>2</sub> doesn't harm or kill people. What it does is trap heat in the atmosphere—enormous amounts of heat—and it is that heated atmosphere that harms and kills people through more violent extreme weather events, wildfires, and rising seas.

Here you see global average temperatures. Back in 1986, they were 0.46 degrees Celsius above the preindustrial norm. Now, they are 1.4 degrees above that preindustrial norm. That difference, nearly a full degree, has already had profound consequences for our planet. For one, our oceans are heating every year by the zettajoule.

If you don't know what a zettajoule is, let me tell you. It has 21 zeroes after it. You can either call it a billion trillions or a trillion billions. It is an enormous number.

The entire production and consumption of energy by the human species on planet Earth is half a zettajoule. And because of the heating generated by the greenhouse gases, more than 24 zettajoules of excess heat go into the ocean every year. A multiple of our total energy consumption as a species is absorbed by the oceans.

If you want to know why they are warming, if you want to know why reefs are dying, if you want to know why fisheries are moving around, if you want to know why seas are rising, if you want to know why storms are worsening, there is your answer: zettajoules of excess heat into the oceans caused by fossil fuel.

And all of that has economic cost. In this building, I have grown, I suppose, accustomed to the fact that nobody cares about anything that can't be monetized, and they only care about it to the extent that it is monetized. So here is some monetization of what all that means. In 1986—here—there were three—one, two, three—three billion-dollar disasters in the United States. Last year, there were 23 billion-dollar disasters. The recent L.A. wildfires alone destroyed thousands of homes and did tens of billions of dollars in damage.

And guess what happens when that kind of damage soars? Insurance moves with it. You actually don't have to be directly affected by a climate change-driven extreme weather event, a hurricane, or a wildfire to be paying the price for climate change. Back in 1986, when Senator Chafee held his hearings, homeowners insurance premiums averaged about \$150 annually. In today's money, they averaged \$470, roughly. Today—today—premiums average almost \$2,500, and—no surprise—the largest increases are in the highest climate risk areas. In Florida and Louisiana, homeowners insurance premiums average more than \$10,000, and they are predicted to increase—doubling, even tripling—off the proverbial charts.

Climate change is no longer tomorrow's problem, and it has moved from the science department into the economics department. It is here today. And whether my colleagues care to admit it or not, we are all already paying for it. Economists estimate that it costs every household an average of around \$500 per year in heightened climate cost, and that is a conservative estimate. In many coastal and wildfire-exposed parts of the country, that average annual cost is already north of \$1,000 per household cost. And that hidden climate tax, brought to you by the fossil fuel industry, is steadily rising year after year.

This is what 40 years of inaction and obstruction following the Chafee hearings has wrought: huge costs and increasing economic dislocation. What was once a scientific issue, a prediction, is now knocking at our door and causing immediate economic harm.

And then there is the politics. In 1986, the hope and determination to tackle climate change was a bipartisan thing. Today, climate change has been replaced in the Republican Party by climate denial. When I got here in 2007, climate change was still a bipartisan concern. We had major climate legislation in this body—four different measures that I recall, each significant, each that would have changed the trajectory that these pages will face in their lifetime.

But then—then—the 2010 Citizens United decision came down. That decision unleashed a vast fossil fuel-funded armada of front groups that spread around climate disinformation, perhaps the biggest fraudulent operation in the country's history, and unlimited dark money into our politics—perhaps the largest corruption enterprise in American history.

Back in 1986, Senator Chafee did not face a politics awash in fossil fuel dark money, and the armada of climate denial front groups did not exist; and so the Senate was able to focus more on the public interest and less on fossil fuel's special interests. Today, objecting to my calls to this body to recognize the reality of climate change, the objector sent here accused me of "subscribing to Chicken Little scare tactics." That is the 2026 Republican position.

Back in 1986, Republican John Chafee, before this became the "House of Mammon," opened his climate change hearing by saying something very different. He said:

This is not a matter of Chicken Little telling us the sky is falling.

Forty years of fossil fuel influence has made a sickening difference.

The 1986 Chafee hearing is also illustrative of the power of Congress when, uncorrupted by a powerful special interest, it acts decisively in favor of the public.

At the time of the Chafee hearing, depletion of the Earth's protective ozone layer was allowing dangerous

levels of solar radiation to penetrate the atmosphere. Twin holes in the ozone layer had formed around the North and South Poles, and the ozone holes were growing.

Scientists worried that, absent immediate action, the holes would grow big enough to threaten the survival of life on Earth. That fear is ancient history now. Why? Not because we mocked the scientists for fearmongering, but because we did as the science advised and phased out the use of ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons.

In 1990, just 4 years after the Chafee hearings, Congress passed the 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act, which required this phaseout. No surprise, the scientists were right, and the phaseout worked.

Chlorofluorocarbons stay in the atmosphere for decades. So it took years to see the effects of the ban. But beginning in the 2000s, the ozone holes stabilized and then began to shrink. And if current policies remain in place, scientists expect a return to pre-1980s levels, a healing of the ozone holes, within the next four decades.

We could still do the same for climate change: Follow the science, pass a law to implement policies that would reduce and eventually eliminate carbon pollution, remove the already emitted carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and restore our climate's natural health, halt and eventually reverse dangerous sea level rise and the dangerous cycle of ever-worsening storms and wildfires, and fend off the insurance collapse that this trajectory portends.

Many of us watched the recent Artemis II mission with awe—with awe of the astronauts who traveled farther than any human has gone before and with awe of NASA's ingenuity to be able to send them there.

Astronaut Christina Koch, speaking from over 200,000 miles away from Earth, spoke to future generations. She said:

We will explore. We will build. . . . We will visit again. We will construct science outposts. . . . We will found companies. We will bolster industry. We will inspire. But, ultimately, we will always choose Earth. We will always choose each other.

Her closing words would resonate, I think, with Senator John Chafee. Forty years ago, he said:

It seems that the problems man creates for our planet are never ending. But we have found solutions for prior difficulties, and we will for these as well.

With those words of his, I salute the memory of Senator John Chafee, whose seat I now hold. He was an inspiring and farsighted public servant. We need more of them.

I should add that the NASA scientists who made that remarkable Artemis voyage possible have no doubts about the climate science.

Those climate doubts, that fake climate denial, are precisely coextensive with the reach of the fossil fuel industry's corrupt political influence.

There are two paths that emerged from Senator Chafee's hearing. One was the path of science to success against ozone depletion. The other—the one we have unfortunately chosen—is the path of climate denial fraud and dark-money political corruption that leads to failure.

We can do better, but only if we wake up.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, let me thank my colleague from Rhode Island and recall affectionately that, when I came to the Senate in 1997, John Chafee was serving. And I had an opportunity to meet with him and to work with him on something that he loved called the Atlantic Forum. He asked me to join him in a bipartisan way to lead that effort in the Senate—such a compliment for a freshman Senator to have that kind of request from a man of his stature.

He served our country so well in World War II, maybe even in the Korean war, as well, in the Marine Corps, before he was elected Governor of your State.

I attended his memorial service in Providence, and it was quite a crowd, as there should have been.

Thank you for bringing up his name in this positive way.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. To the Senator, through the Chair, I, too, was at that memorial service. It probably was the first time we saw one another.

Thank you.

#### SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I was first elected to the House of Representatives, here in Washington, in 1982. That is a long time ago, but I remember very well my first year in the House.

Politically, I was scared to death. It was my first election victory, and I had defeated a 22-year Republican incumbent Congressman. I was looking over my shoulder every day, every minute, every bill, every vote, thinking: This is it. I can't get this done.

And then they came around and told us something I didn't want to hear at all. They said: Incidentally, the Social Security system is going broke, and it will happen within a year or 2, and we have to fix it.

I thought to myself: This is the end of me. No matter what they come up with—whatever proposal it is—the controversy will be so intense that it will cost me my congressional seat.

I listened to the debate, and I saw the end product that was suggested, in 1983, for 50 years of solvency for Social Security and decided, in the end, that the responsible thing to do was to vote for it.

We passed it. We waited to see what the electorate would do. Not a single Member of the House of Representatives of either party lost an election

attributable to the Social Security vote.

By making some hard decisions in a timely fashion, saving Social Security, we did the right thing for America, and, politically, it turned out to be a safe thing, whether we believed it at the time or not.

So now we face another crisis in Social Security. The 50 years of solvency which we bought in 1983 is running out. The Social Security Board of Trustees releases a report that tells us about the status of Social Security finances. Their 2026 report, released yesterday, should send alarm bells through Congress. According to the Board of Trustees, the Social Security trust fund will be unable to make full scheduled payments in 2032.

So the effort that I was involved in, in 1983, paid off. We bought 50 years, but now what are we going to do?

Just 6 years from now, Social Security will only be able to pay 78 percent of current benefits. What does that mean?

I will give you a rough illustration. The average Social Security check in the United States is around \$2,500. If you reduce it by 22 percent, people will receive about \$450 less each month.

It means that beneficiaries across our Nation will see their benefit checks cut by 22 percent. Twenty-two percent means \$455. It is about or around the average a retired household spends on groceries each month.

That could be devastating. We cannot let it happen.

Roughly, 70 million Americans—seniors and people with disabilities—rely on Social Security for food, medication, housing, and utilities. In my home State Illinois, over 2.3 million people receive Social Security. Twenty percent of seniors in Illinois rely on it for all or nearly all of their income. It is all they have. Each year, Social Security lifts 533,000 seniors 65 and over out of poverty in my State.

Social Security is a lifeline that they earned after a lifetime of hard work. But many beneficiaries still struggle with living expenses. Every day, seniors are forced to make decisions most Americans pray they will never have to face, like whether to buy groceries or pay the utility bill, refill their medications or pay their rent or mortgage.

Now, if we do nothing—if Congress does nothing—with this Board of Trustees report, every single Senator faces the prospect of making do with \$455 less a month in just 6 years.

These are not hypotheticals. Every single Senator has received these heartbreaking stories from constituents about what they are doing, struggling to survive on a fixed income or Social Security.

One of my constituents Kimberly shared her appreciation of Social Security and said it is traced back to her grandmother, who was a maid and commuted to the suburbs from Chicago to work each day.

Kimberly said her grandmother stopped school in the ninth grade and

had a family of eight children. When she retired after her husband died, she relied heavily on Social Security.

Kimberly said:

Social Security was [my mom's] monthly stream of income—her only monthly stream of income.

So why haven't we done something to avoid this deadline in 2032? It is because we have a fear of doing what is right and maybe politically unpopular.

Every year, when the Social Security Trustees Report is released, we again bury our heads in the sand and say: Thank goodness some future Congress will take care of this problem.

Social Security is a bedrock promise we made to America—the most fundamental safety net program in America—and I am concerned that Congress will wait until the absolute last minute to try to do anything to save it. That would make it extremely difficult and make it irresponsible conduct and unacceptable.

Earlier today, I released a bipartisan statement. Yes, Senators of both political parties issued a statement together. Senators BILL CASSIDY, TIM KAINE, THOM TILLIS, and I are saying to Congress: Don't wait. Do something.

We must find a way for Congress to debate this issue in a transparent, fair, and bipartisan way, a mechanism that forces us to make meaningful, important policy choices.

Several of us have been working together, trying to figure out how we can strengthen Social Security for future generations of retirees. We say to our colleagues: Join us in doing what we were elected to do—legislate on hard issues and protect this lifeline program, Social Security, for our kids and grandkids, because we do not have a shortage of ideas. What we lack is the will to do it.

There are many bills that are out there. The senior Senator from Vermont has a bill to address this crisis; the junior Senator from Rhode Island, the same; the senior Senator from Hawaii, equally. The senior Senator from Louisiana is working on it as well.

Good ideas are out there, but we need to come together on a bipartisan basis and agree on a path that buys 50 years of solvency at a minimum. Those Senators worked their proposals for a long time. They want to present them to the Senate, and they should.

But to do that, we have to do something we haven't done in a long time. Get ready. Buckle your seatbelts. I am talking about legislating, actually bringing a measure to the floor and opening it to amendment. We would say: You could offer an amendment, if you wish, to anyone's proposal for Social Security, but whatever you do, it has to buy a minimum of 50 years of solvency for Social Security. And then let's vote.

There will be some ideas that will be crazy and that you wouldn't even consider them. But I think we can work to a bipartisan solution to our challenge as well.