

50 million lives lost in the 1918 influenza pandemic or the many thousands lost in the SARS, Ebola, MERS, and other recent infectious disease outbreaks to recognize that far more must be done to reduce the risk of catastrophic pandemics. Rather than waiting until disease outbreaks occur, then scrambling at great expense for 2 or 3 years or however long it takes to develop a vaccine while countless people die, we need to act proactively. It is worth noting that tens of millions of people have died, and we still lack a vaccine against HIV.

Viral threats will continue to emerge at a rapidly accelerating pace in response to expanding global populations in the least developed countries, international travel, and human encroachment into wildlife habitat. And we know that the vast majority of emerging viruses, like HIV, are zoonotic—infectious diseases that can spread between animals and humans.

In an effort to strengthen global capacity for detection and discovery of zoonotic viruses, the U.S. Agency for International Development, USAID, initiated the PREDICT project in 2009. Its goal was to identify new emerging viruses with pandemic potential and improve predictive modeling to better focus surveillance, data collection, and analytics to reduce the risk of animal viruses spilling over and spreading in human populations. Through the collection and analysis of wildlife samples in areas of the world most at risk for zoonotic disease, PREDICT was able to discover disease pathogens at their source, rather than waiting for human infection.

Over the past decade and through its work in more than 30 countries, PREDICT has identified hundreds of viruses and has estimated that there are more than 1.6 million unknown viral disease species in mammalian and avian populations, of which an estimated 600,000 to 850,000 have the potential to infect humans. PREDICT has proven the feasibility of a global, systematic viral discovery program and paved the way for continued progress toward a more proactive approach to reducing pandemic risk.

As the PREDICT project comes to an end next year, USAID is exploring ways to build on its successful analytical and modeling work and is in the process of designing the next phase of programming to continue this critical effort. It is my hope that others in the international community will use the lessons learned and techniques proven from PREDICT to inform their own efforts.

Currently, the international community often targets global health investments on infrastructure, institutions, and human resources. While that approach works to strengthen public health systems and to tackle existing diseases, reducing the risk of future pandemics will require a substantially different approach. As the PREDICT project has shown, there are ways to

use data, research, and technology to proactively identify viral threats. Using existing health science and technology to continue to fill the knowledge gap for unknown viruses will save precious lives and dollars in the future.

Thanks to the work of USAID, we have a strong basis of knowledge on which to expand this critical research. While the large pool of viral threats lying dormant in animals has not changed, human interaction with wildlife has. In this increasingly globalized and densely populated world, where it is easier than ever for zoonotic diseases to rapidly spread across regions and continents, it is essential that the international community focus on finding innovative ways to reduce pandemic risk.

One approach is through a global viral discovery effort, in which countries share data on previously unknown viruses, which will transform the fight against pandemic threats from a reactive to a proactive undertaking. This is not a technological challenge; it is matter of political will and resources. It will require commitments from governments around the world to collect and share data on previously unknown viruses. While I recognize that is easier said than done, better equipping humanity to protect itself against catastrophic pandemics is an investment we cannot afford not to make.

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SKIRACK

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, Vermont, the Green Mountain State, is filled with outdoor enthusiasts: people who ski, snowboard, mountain bike, hike, and do so much more. Outdoor enthusiasts who live in Chittenden County or who have visited the area are likely to have perused the walls, shelves, and aisles of the Skirack in Burlington, VT. Today I want to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Skirack, a small business that has become a staple of downtown Burlington.

Just a few blocks from its present location at the corner of Main and Pine Streets in downtown Burlington, the Skirack first opened its doors on November 22, 1969, driven by the vision of a group of University of Vermont students. The founders of the Skirack—Karen George, Zandy Wheeler, Spike Clayton, and John George-Wheeler—opened the shop with one goal in mind: to provide the finest outdoor goods and services. Over the next 50 years, their store has equipped Vermonters and visitors to our State with the essentials as they face the elements and reach new heights, both literal and figurative.

Vermont has a proud and prominent legacy of outdoor recreation. Vermonters, or those who visit, can cross country ski, swim in Lake Champlain, mountain bike, or go on a trek through any of Vermont's magnificent forest trails. Contrary to the store's name, the Skirack has been

Vermonters' one-stop shop for all of their outdoor recreational needs, regardless of the season.

Since its inception, the Skirack has been the recipient of numerous honors and accolades. The store has been named the Snowsports Retailer of the Year and Nordic Retailer by Ski Industries of America. But recognition of the Skirack goes far beyond their snow sport inventory. For 5 years in a row, from 2013 through 2017, it was named one of America's best bike shops by the National Bicycle Dealers Association and in 2018 was named one of the 20 Best Running Shops in America by Gear Patrol.

The Skirack has gone through many changes throughout its 50 years of operation. In 1974, Karen, Zandy, Spike, and John moved the Skirack from its small shop on Center Street to where it is currently located on Main Street in downtown Burlington. Over time, they were able to double the size of their store by expanding to the building next door. Then, in May 2011, they began a special partnership with Patagonia and opened a second store, Patagonia Burlington. And today, the Skirack employs more than 80 Vermonters.

Vermont's economy depends on small businesses like the Skirack. Over the years, those small businesses have become the backbone of Vermont's economy. In 2018, the more than 77,000 small businesses made up 99 percent of Vermont businesses—99 percent. In Vermont, almost 60 percent of employees, over 158,000 Vermonters, are employed by a small business. I am proud that small businesses such as The Skirack, have not only been able to not only survive but thrive.

With the holiday season approaching, it is important for Americans across the country to visit their hometown Main Street stores as they shop for friends and family. Holiday sales represent 20 percent of average annual sales across most industries and 30 percent or more for some businesses.

Marcelle and I congratulate Karen, Zandy, Spike, and John on an incredible 50 years of operations at the Skirack. We wish them all the best of luck, and we hope for 50 more strong years.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise to speak up for those who serve our country all around the world, courageously, selflessly, with great sacrifice. I rise on behalf of our diplomatic corps, our Foreign Service Officers, civil servants, and State Department personnel. I rise on behalf of patriotic Americans serving our country on the front lines of war zones and devastating conflicts, in countries with oppressive governments and societies hostile to our own.

Our national security is stronger because of them. American people are safer because of them. Our children's futures will be more secure, more prosperous, because of them. And because

of them and their hard work and sacrifice, our grandchildren may know a world with less pain, less strife, less conflict. And yet they have come under attack, simply for serving their country.

This week, three State Department witnesses are testifying during the House of Representatives' impeachment hearings on the Trump-Ukraine scandal. These individuals have, in many cases, spent their entire careers serving our Nation with distinction, on behalf of both Republican and Democratic administrations. Some have even worn the uniform of the U.S. Armed Forces.

These men and women are not partisans. They are patriots, patriots who put our country first. And for putting country first, for being willing to tell the truth, they have come under attack—not by a foreign regime bristling at their efforts to promote democracy, not by oligarchs and criminals who fear their effectiveness—though that has happened as well.

No. They have come under attack in our own country, by our own President, by the head of our government that they so bravely and selflessly serve. It pains me, and so I am standing before you today to speak up on their behalf, on behalf of each voice that has come forward in this time of need and tumult for our country. This is a time when we need truth—truth above party, truth above political loyalties and expediency, truth above self-interest. These diplomats, these professionals, these proud public servants are putting the country before themselves—if only this President could do the same, if only he—just once—could put the interests of others ahead of his own.

But frankly, I am not the one who should be standing up on behalf of our diplomatic corps, nor should it be only the Democrats on the Foreign Relations Committee. There is a job post that actually entails standing up for the men and women of our State Department each and every day. The job is called Secretary of State. It is a job held by Secretary Mike Pompeo. Yet under Secretary Pompeo's watch, the dedicated Americans who serve in the State Department have been thrown to the wolves.

Our Secretary of State should be the No. 1 defender of our diplomatic corps. He should come forward and tell the American people what he saw, what he heard, and what he did about it. He should defend the officials who serve in his own Department. And he could start by uttering just one word of support for Ambassador Taylor, Deputy Assistant Secretary Kent, and Ambassador Yovanovitch. But he has had plenty of time for that. We have seen very clearly where he stands.

So instead, I, along with my Democratic colleagues on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, are calling on other senior officials at the State Department to step up and do the right

thing. This week, we sent a letter to the Deputy Secretary of State, John Sullivan, and the Undersecretary for Management, Brian Bulatao, calling on them to do what Pompeo has not: to publicly support the brave officials who are putting their careers, their reputations, and terribly, even their personal finances on the line—all to serve their country. I hope that they do, even in the face of vicious and unfounded attacks unleashed by the President, his allies, and those who refuse to stand up for the truth.

Some have been called “disloyal,” “unpatriotic,” and “Never Trumper.” In fact, yesterday morning, as State officials were about to begin testifying, the President tweeted, in all caps, “NEVER TRUMPERS!” These false attacks misunderstand the entire premise of public service. To be a career public servant means to work every day on behalf of the public, our government, our country, our Constitution, to check politics at the door. To argue otherwise demonstrates this President's warped view of how our government works. Our career Federal employees do not serve him. They serve our country. They serve the American people.

The only “loyalty” they pledge is loyalty to the oath they take to uphold our Constitution. In coming forward, in speaking the truth, in raising concerns about events that trouble them as guardians of our national security, they are carrying out an act of selfless patriotism and love of country that that this President is incapable of understanding, let alone doing himself.

I hope that some of our other senior officials will step forward and show just a sliver of the backbone that these individuals have shown. I hope they will do the right thing. I hope they will issue statements of public support for officials courageously coming before Congress and commit to protecting them from retribution or reprisal.

Our State Department employees deserve commendation, not retaliation. They deserve our thanks, not our scorn. Above all else, they deserve leaders who will defend them, not desert them when it matters most.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LAST GREEN VALLEY

• Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, today I rise to recognize The Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor as it celebrates 25 years of protection and preservation of this environmentally sensitive, pristine area.

Originally designated as the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor, the valley was officially designated as a critical natural resource by President Clinton on November 2, 1994. Twenty years later, it was officially renamed The Last Green Valley.

For a quarter of a century, The Last Green Valley advocates have worked to care for the corridor through nonprofit stewardship. Overall, the valley comprises a 1,100-square-mile area, which ranges from eastern Connecticut to south-central Massachusetts. One of the most notable aspects of the valley is its rural characteristics despite its proximity to three of New England's largest urban areas. Among its 707,000 acres, 77 percent of this range is farmland and forest.

The Last Green Valley's designation as a national heritage corridor by Congress acknowledges its status as a unique national resource. Included in this designation are 26 towns in Connecticut and 9 in Massachusetts. The underdeveloped, green area so close to many large urban spaces makes it a point of special ecological interest and a great environmental asset to Connecticut and the nation.

Dedicated to preserving the natural beauty and resources of New England from development and despoilment, The Last Green Valley sets a positive example of environmental conservation and protection. I applaud its accomplishments and hope my colleagues will join me in congratulating The Last Green Valley on 25 years of excellence.●

RECOGNIZING K. NEAL TRUCK AND BUS CENTER

• Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, it is with great pride that I name K. Neal Truck and Bus Center the United States Senate Small Business of the Week.

K. Neal Truck and Bus Center is a family-owned business based in Hyattsville, MD. Following a decades-long career in the grocery business, Stephen Neal purchased a trucking business and renamed it after his son, Korey Neal.

Together, the father-son team has turned K. Neal into the second largest minority-owned truck and bus supplier in the country, with more than \$100 million in annual revenue and just under 100 employees.

On the Senate Small Business Committee, we often speak of small businesses as drivers of economic growth and innovation, but they are often also pillars in their communities, and K. Neal is no exception.

I had the privilege of meeting with Stephen, Korey, and several K. Neal executives last month, and I was impressed by the company's commitment to empowering all its employees and investing in its community.

Half of the executives at K. Neal are women, and for the past 5 years, the company has partnered with the Prince George's County Economic Development Corporation to train workers from underserved communities to become diesel technicians. I am proud to share that 14 individuals have completed the program, and 8 of them are currently employed by the company. The company also voluntarily banned