

The Future Is Calling Us to Greatness

with Michael Dowd + 56 Experts



Speaking Prophetically in the U.S. Senate

with U.S. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse

Big ideas from this session:

- How a Senator from Rhode Island became the clearest voice for climate action in the U. S. Senate
- The single most important systemic action that needs to be taken in the immediate future
- How and where each of us can leverage our political impact most forcefully and effectively

Michael: I don't want to assume that everybody that will be watching or listening to this will know who you are and really what you're committed to, what you your stand for. Could you please just begin by introducing yourself and mention some of the things that perhaps you're most proud of in terms of what you have accomplished, and especially what you're committed to.

What you've been doing on a weekly basis is just extraordinary in my opinion. More people need to know about that. Of course, I want to help facilitate that in religious circles. But if you could just begin by just sharing a little bit about sort of who you are and what you're most committed to.

Sheldon: Great. Well, I'm Sheldon Whitehouse. I represent the state of Rhode Island in the United States Senate. The state of Rhode Island is the Ocean State. That's our motto. We have a long coastline that winds around our shores and around our island. We take our maritime heritage very seriously.

It's an important part of our economy and of our life to be an ocean state. So one of the issues that I fight very hard on here in Washington is on climate change.

Michael: Well, that's great, but I just read your bio, and I'd love for you to share a little bit more in terms of one of the things that you've been involved in in your time in the Senate, and also who have been some of your most important mentors, because I think that's enlightening as well.

Sheldon: Yes. Well, climate change has obviously been a significant issue. I have fought very hard to try to help us recover from the great economic knockdown that we had and to do that in a way that is fair to an increasingly beleaguered middle class. The fixers and the big money folks have plenty of clout in Washington, and they don't hesitate to use it to help themselves.

You've got to be working pretty hard and pushing back pretty consistently just to stay even for the middle class. So that has been another major battle of mine. Cyber security and trying to make our health care better and cheaper, not just the Obamacare fight, but try to improve our delivery system. Those have been some of the major battles that I've fought for.

I was probably the loudest voice, one of the earliest voices and most persistent voices, against the torture program, which I thought has no place in our country's ethics.

Michael: Yes. Amen. One of the things that I noticed and find a resonance between us is that I have the most significant person is my wife Connie Barlow, who is a science writer. She keeps my theology and my ministry grounded in our best evidential understanding of reality. Of course, your wife, as I understand it, is also a marine biologist.

Could you say a little bit about that and about how she has influenced you in terms of your celebration of science, not just to something secular.

Sheldon: Sandra is a marine biologist. She was pursuing her graduate degrees when I was dating her. One of my formative experiences was being obliged to go diving with her in Narragansett Bay in the middle of the winter in order to help her with her experiments. She had to go out and monitor her stations regularly throughout the year, including in the winter.

Of course, I was a complete wuss about, "It's going to be too cold. Why am I chipping ice off the boat?" I usually don't go boating when you have to chip ice off the boat. The final straw was she said, "Take off your gloves," just before we jumped into the water. I said, "What do you mean, take off my gloves? The water is cold."

She said, "Well, you're not dexterous enough in the big rubber gloves. I need you to be able to work with your fingers on this stuff." I said, "But my hands will be cold." She looked at me coldly and she said, "They go numb soon enough. Don't worry." My wife is tougher, smarter, and more knowledgeable about the science than I am.

Michael: Wow. Oh, that's great. You have two kids, I understand. How old are they now?

Sheldon: Twenty-one and twenty-five.

Michael: Oh, okay. Mine are 23, 29, and 31.

Sheldon: Yes. So you're a scooch ahead of us.

Michael: Just a little bit. Yes. Well, Senator, could you please say—one of the things, as I mentioned already, that I've been hugely grateful for and have turned others on to is your weekly Senate talks on climate change. You seem to come around again and again to this theme of waking up and really that there's a difference between being an alarmist, which is shouting an alarm when there really is no alarm, and actually voicing in the most responsible way possible how to respond to a truly alarming message.

Could you say a little bit about both your understanding of where we are in terms of the climate crisis and what still needs to be done? What would you like to see as the next major thing to move us in the right direction? Then just anything you'd like to say about the series that you've been doing.

Sheldon: Well, the science of the climate crisis at this point is pretty obvious. We're through 400 parts per million atmospheric carbon, which has never happened in the entire occupation of this planet by our species, and we're seeing the most dramatic acidification of the ocean in millions and millions of years.

Homo sapiens has been around maybe 200,000 years. So the science is pretty hard to debate. The real issue is the politics of it. The politics of it is that the Republican party does not want to discuss this, because, first of all, too many of their members actually know better.

Too many of them have actually pretty good records on climate change, until Citizens United, the Supreme Court decision that unleashed the unlimited corporate got decided, and then it was like a heart beat that goes to a flat line, right after that decision. So much of that Citizens United money got spent against Republicans.

People forget that this isn't Republican versus Democrat. This is big money trying to intimidate anybody, and they started by trying to knock down dissent in the Republican Party, and it worked. So you've got Republicans who don't want to do anything about climate change, because they're terrified of what the big money folks will do.

They don't want to deny, because they know that's wrong and that's crazy. They just want everybody to be quiet. If what they want is for everybody to be quiet, I want to be noisy, and I want to keep raising this issue up, both to have the advocates on my side and the people who care about this and the scientists know that we haven't given up on them, that there is a voice in Washington, and actually many that are with them and that get this, and also to take away from the Republican party the ability to have this not be a topic.

That's their best outcome. Once it's a topic, they're thrust into the impossible position—I mean, there are a few of them who actually believe this, deny our nonsense, but it's a very small group. Most of them just don't want to tangle with the big money.

Michael: Wow, that was really insightful. I actually had not thought about it that way. I'm sort of sitting here in this moment like, "Oh, damn, that's so true. Why hadn't I seen that?"

Sheldon: Yes. John McCain ran for President on a really strong climate platform. Susan Collins did a carbon bill with Maria Cantwell. Mark Kirk voted for Waxman-Markey, the house climate change bill, when he was over in the House of Representatives. There have been a bunch of them who have come out for a carbon tax.

Lisa Murkowski talks about ocean acidification all the time. But all of that energy and activity on their side has completely gone to ground after Citizens United.

Michael: Yes. Yes. Well, what can be done? What can the average citizen, the person watching this, listening to this, how we can help—clearly, it seems to me, we need to—whether you call it fee and dividend or tax on carbon or putting the true cost in carbon effect. I think Bob Inglis said it the most concise way that I've heard anybody say it.

He said the thing that we most need to do is simply this. Put all the costs and all the fuels, remove all the subsidies, and then watch the free market enterprise solve the climate and energy crisis. I think he just nailed it there. How can the person watching this and wanting to support us moving in the right direction, what can we do?

Sheldon: Yes, we're in touch with Bob pretty regularly, and I think he's a very important advocate in this fight. I think he is absolutely right. It is by far the second best response to this problem to have government regulation, government deciding where the subsidies go and all of that, to simply clear it out so that the market is making the decisions, but a properly balanced market that actually takes the real costs to everybody into account.

That's the ultimate resolution that will solve this problem. That's the answer. How you get there is that people have to be more active. The Republican Party I would describe as an unwilling hostage of the polluting interests right now. They're watching the public shift away from them. They're watching their own young voters shift away from them.

Here's an interesting poll result. Young Republican voters, self identified Republicans, if they're under the age of 35, the majority of them think that climate denial is out of touch, ignorant, or crazy. Those are the words they choose. They're in this very difficult position.

As pressure mounts and as the public moves away from them, at some point they're going to have to say to the polluters, "Look, you guys, if you want anybody to be supporting you, you're going to have to back off on this, because nobody is going to be able to get elected if they're not right on this issue. You're going to kill us. You've got to back off."

Or simply say, "I'm tired of you guys. I'm going with the public, and I'll take my chances with the polluters in the next election, because I see that the public has moved." That's the step we need to push them to.

Every American, every person watching this, has a role to make their voice heard, writing a letter to the editor, calling frequently into their congressional offices, joining a local organization, making sure that the organizations they already join, their church, their bowling league, whatever it is, does whatever they can to participate in this issue and make their voices heard. If we don't do this now, we're going to have a hell of a price to pay later.

Michael: Yes. Yes. Exactly. This is one of the things that I've been—as you may know, Connie, my wife, and I have been traveling North America for the last 12 years, speaking and preaching in churches and colleges and universities, mostly where science, inspiration, and sustainability intersect. Just a year and a half ago we watched David Roberts' Tedex talk called Climate Change is Simple.

Then I reached out to Joe Roman. It has basically gone from back burner to front burner in a major, major way. One of the things that I've been doing now for the last year to year and a half is encouraging everybody who comes to my programs or watches any of my stuff on YouTube or whatever to go to someplace like CarbonTax.org or CitizensClimateLobby.org or EnergyandEnterprise.com.

Follow your heart. You want to be able to look at a young person three, four, five, six years from now, when we've in fact put a fair price on carbon, and you want to look them in the eyes, and you want to say, "Yes, I helped make that happen." If we wait another decade to do that, or if we do that in the next two, three, or four years, just that difference will make the difference between the suffering of billions of humans and animals over the course of the next thousand years. It's that huge.

Sheldon: Yes. It really is that huge. I'm so glad that you're doing what you're doing, because I think the faith community has a big role to play here. Particularly the evangelical community is into climate denial. You see the Jewish community very strongly out on climate. You see Pope Frances, who has been terrific on this.

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops has been great, the Baptists. There are a lot of our major religious faiths that have been very, very strong. Ehen it comes to the

evangelical side, there's a sense that they kind of think that it's all going to just—God is going to reach down and make it right somehow.

I think it's really important that you're out speaking and doing what you're doing in the faith community. I will confess to you that I actually heard a—there's a prayer breakfast in the Senate every Wednesday morning. I go to it very often. Somebody who was attending that prayer breakfast I heard say when we were talking about climate change, "Don't worry, God will look out for us. He'll sort it out," basically.

Well, that's a really peculiar understanding of religion, when you think that God will let a child burn its hand on a hot stove because that is the rule [Inaudible 14:07] that God build.

Michael: Yes. One of the things—you're really putting your finger on something that I've had a lot of passionate involvement in in quite some time. Back in the mid-1990's . . .

Sheldon: You might want to take a look at the speech I gave about that exact matter. I'm not a clerical person, and I am certainly not expert in matters of religion. But that ran counter to everything that I know and learned about the Bible, so I gave a speech on that on the Senate floor as [Inaudible 14:40]. I'll have Seth send it to you.

Michael: Yes, please do. I'll post that as well. This topic of how the religious communities relate to our world and to the future, whether they're promoting an honorable or dishonorable relationship to future generations is a huge one. Back in the 1990's, the mid-90's, I worked with Paul Goodman and Amy Fox and some of the folks at the cathedral St. John the Divine on sort of helping to organize religious communities.

Then I was the religious organizer back when Phil Clapp—I don't know if you knew Phil, but Phil was the head of the National Environmental Trust. I was the religious organizer. I helped organize Jewish rabbis, Catholic priests, Protestant clergy, and evangelical clergy on key environmental issues that were coming up for a vote in Congress.

It has been very frustrating to me to see the entrenchment of especially the evangelical community. I think, and this is where I've started getting bolder myself—I just uploaded just a couple of days ago a new five-part educational series designed for church study groups called God in Big History, big history, of course, being the history of everyone and everything that science gives us.

How do we understand God and how do we understand things like God's word or divine revelation or scripture? If we limit scripture to only ancient texts rather than what God, reality is revealing through evidence, then we're going to have a skewed understanding of reality. One of the things that's most difficult is that something like 41% of Americans say that

they believe that these are the end times and Jesus is coming back, and they think of a literal man coming down in the sky.

So there's no sense of responsibility for future generations. I find that [Inaudible 16:20].

Sheldon: [Inaudible 16:20] cash out now than leave anything on the table. We're all going to be out of here in a couple of years. Grow old and enjoy what you can. That would be the logic. But people have thought that for thousands and thousands of years, and they've always been wrong. A prudent judgment wouldn't follow that.

Michael: Well, exactly. Two of the things I've seen most potently on this topic, John Michael Greer, who writes on peak oil and sustainability, he wrote a book called *Apocalypse Not: Everything You Know About Nostradamus, 2012, and the Rapture is Wrong*. Then Brian Paisley up in Canada did a TV series called *Apocalypse When?*

Both of them independently—they don't know about each other, or they didn't. Both of them independently chronicled the 3,200 year history of end times thinking and the suffering and the tragedy that has resulted from both religious and sometimes secular groups believing that these are the end times.

Sheldon: The point that I make—and I'm now coming into your turf, so I'd love to have your thoughts on it. But in my view of things, the laws of science that so many of these climate skeptics deride are actually God's laws.

Michael: Amen.

Sheldon: In some respects, they're God's greatest gift to us because it's through the stability of laws of chemistry, of laws of physics, of laws of gravity, that we've been able to learn more and more about our world and how it works, and have it work reliably the same way every time, so that we can build skyscrapers and they don't fall down.

We can build jets, and they fly through space. We can design new drugs, and we can cure our diseases. We can't do any of that if we don't have those stable laws of science that are at the heart of God's confidence in us, that with that structure laid out before us we will grow and develop as His people. That's my sense of it.

Michael: Yes, well, I agree. One of the things that I've been—sort of the main drum beat that I've been now doing for quite some time is saying that we trivialize God and we trivialize the notion of God's word if we think of God merely in otherworldly supernatural terms as a being up there, out there, who blesses some and smites others.

We think that God's best guidance is frozen in the distant past, rather than every fact discovered by scientists is a word of God. It's a revelation. It's reality revealing truth. At any rate, I'm on my soapbox. So, Senator, could you please . . .

Sheldon: Good soapbox.

Michael: Yes. Thank you. Could you share a little bit about what it is—I mean, the title of this conversation series is *The Future is Calling Us to Greatness*. This theme that when we take a deep time perspective we recognize that it's really useful, it's a practical truth, to imagine how the past is rooting for us and the future is calling us to greatness.

For many of us who are aware of some of these big challenges, that kind of an idea inspires us to wake up excited to do our part, to play our role. Could you share a little bit about where you find—what is your inspiration? What are the things that nourish you or feed you or inspire you, that wake you up committed to doing this great work that you're doing.

Sheldon: I think of two things. One, I think of the consequences. We now know enough about what's going on to be able to predict with some degree of certainty and with very, very high degrees of certainty within certain ranges what's going to happen if we don't get this turned around. As you've pointed out, if we behave dishonorably to future generations through our greed in this moment, we will carry a very heavy burden of shame and disgrace.

On the negative side, that's a spur, and there's no doubt about it. I do not want to be—I was a child of the greatest generation. I grew up as a kid with the greatest generation, as my father, as my uncles, as my mentors. For us to be the foulest generation and the selfishest generation in the immediate wake of having been the children of the greatest generation would be really a disgrace.

The second thing, though, is that there's also kind of a moral opportunity in all of this, because it's a chance for us to choose in a very broad way to put decency and what is right ahead of greed. Very often you get that choice up close. Do you cheat your neighbor? Do you steal their bicycle?

It's not very often in our human history that the problem has been a global problem and that we've had not only the obligation to do the right thing, but also to find ways to work with people very different from us all around the world, as far away as China, to make that right thing happen.

There is a wonderful sense of being a part of something that is an almost new level of decency and of moral good that can come out of this, in the same way that years ago when the battle against slavery was being fought, Wilbur Forest and all of that in England, it was actually against England's economic interests to stop slavery.

They were huge Caribbean plantation owners. They were huge slavers. They had a whole ship building industry to support the slave trade. There was really no shot on an economic case that they could do this. Yet, you read that story, and it was done because regular people were called in some way by that message.

“Am I not my brother’s keeper?” I think was the phrase that they used. They simply stood up and decided, “It may be in our economic best interests to continue to do this. We’re not going to do it.” It was a moral shift away from pure self-interest. It’s hard to find precedent at that scale where a whole nation does it.

We’re at the stage now where multi nations have to do it, and it’s a new step, a new development, a new growth on our upward climb, I believe. On the positive side, shame drives you from behind and the prospect of being something that is a better human moral good calls you from the front.

Michael: Yes. Yes. Amen. The way I’ve been framing it and thinking about it, that you just reminded—I’m glad you brought up the sense of calling and the sense of morality, because I really do think that we are at a time that historians looking back, assuming that we survive this and that we truly do come into right relationship with the air, water, soil, and life upon which we depend and of which we’re a part.

But if we make that shift, historians I think will look back at our time as truly one of the greatest transformations in not just human consciousness but human organization. We will have to see international cooperation across ethnic, religious, political, and economic divides, and religious divides, of course.

I think there’s this new sense of heroism or the sense that we are at the brink of something truly great, and it’s a moral issue. It will engage all the religious people and the science people to work together. That’s, I guess, what I’m trying to get at with this whole theme, that The Future is Calling Us to Greatness.

Sheldon: It really is, and I think there’s a role in answering that call for anyone and everyone. There’s a terrific book about the battle against the British slave trade, to go back to that example, where a guy who was kind of nobody—he wasn’t a king. He wasn’t a duke. He wasn’t a prince. He wasn’t a member of Parliament. He wasn’t rich.

He was riding along a post road, and suddenly the sense of the moral oblique of slavery overtook him, and he got off his horse, and he walked up and down. There’s a monument by the highway there now still in England, I’m told. He decided, “You know what, if there’s nobody else out there to do something about this, then it will be me, but we will get this done.”

That was one man alone making that choice. People all across this country can make that same choice and make that same difference. I think it's happening. I feel it and see it around us.

Michael: Yes. Yes. Well, your story, I agree. One of the things I was reminded of with that story about you and your wife and getting into the cold water—my wife is . . .

Sheldon: Me whimpering, her bravely.

Michael: Yes. My wife is sort of one of the main point people right now in America in terms of what's called assisted migration. She's a stand for the health and the survival of trees and tree species. In the past, climate has changed at a scale that trees could move north or move up the mountains. Now the projections are that climate will be changing and is already changing so rapidly in this century that hundreds of species will go extinct.

They'll wink out because they can't move as rapidly as the squirrels, for example, can move their seeds. Wind dispersed trees, no problem. But trees that rely upon animals to move their seeds north every 20-30 years for a new generation, there's just not enough time.

So I've been going with her to these outings, kind of like you going with your wife, into these remote places to examine tree species and plant trees that right now are suffering 200-300 miles south and helping them move north, and doing so, of course, in complete legality and working with the scientists and the naturalists and the botanists and the forestry people.

It's again where I find inspiration from my wife's work to sort of support me in doing the sort of more religious and ethical and moral kinds of stuff within religious communities.

Sheldon: Yes. The editorial in the New York Times this weekend by the scientist who was actually talking about exactly that, how much do we need to do in the wilderness to protect it now that climate change is sweeping through and it's not really pure, untouched wilderness any longer. We have our carbon handprint on it.

Does that mean we have to engage to protect it? He pointed out that the Joshua tree in the Joshua Tree Park in California is probably not going to be in Joshua Tree Park any longer. I did one of my climate visits up to New Hampshire, and the University of New Hampshire scientists said that the state bird of New Hampshire is the purple finch.

At the rate things are going, the purple finch will not have habitat in New Hampshire any longer. New Hampshireites will have to go to Canada to find their state bird. That move is happening, and the people who deny it are living in such a dream world.

Michael: Yes. Well, one of the things that I make the point a lot is that there are no climate denialists in the timber industry any longer. There are no climate denialists in the CIA. There are no climate denialists in the insurance industry. There are no climate denialists at the upper echelons of planning in terms of military.

There are whole sectors of society for which the issue is no longer are humans causing it. The issue is how fast can we marshal the political will and do what needs to be done to avoid the worst catastrophes and to prepare for some of the things that are already baked into the system. As you mentioned the Joshua tree, Glacier National Park. There will be no glaciers in Glacier National Park soon.

Sheldon: Yes. How soon will the people who get it, who aren't denialists, step up a little bit more and enter the conversation a little bit more? That's one of my frustrations, particularly with some of our great American corporations who are doing a terrific business, who have really good climate policies, who have done wonderful things to reduce our energy footprint, who have driven their climate concern into their supply chains in ways that are really unprecedented and noble and also from a business point of view very successful.

But what their sustainability and business model people know and admit hasn't really infiltrated their communications people. It certainly hasn't gotten to their government relations people. The companies who have as good a climate story to tell as Wal-Mart simply don't have that as part of their DC agenda, as part of their communications strategy.

All the folks that you mentioned, if they could just step a little bit more into the conversation, I think that would be a huge tipping point.

Michael: Yes. Yes. I agree completely. In fact, if you would offer me one—here I am speaking. I've got about 55 or 60 speaking engagements lined up still between now and November 1st when the marchers are scheduled to come into Washington, DC on the Great March for Climate Action. I always try to leave my audiences, not necessarily on Sunday sermons, but I always do an evening follow up program that we usually get a third to half the church to show up for.

I try to leave something practical that they can do. What would be something that you would suggest that I could offer in that regard? I've been saying go to ClimateChange.org or Citizens Climate Lobby or whatever. But what would be one thing that you would love to also have me share with audiences?

Sheldon: The thing that I would love to see that I think would be a big tipping point would be to have the CEOs of Coke and Pepsi side by side do a public service announcement saying, "You know, we compete like crazy, Coke and Pepsi. We are at each other's throats for market

share all around the world. But we absolutely agree that climate change is real and that Congress should act on it.”

Michael: That’s great.

Sheldon: Then get the CEOs of Wal-Mart and Target. Then get the CEOs of UPS and FedEx. Then get the CEOs of GM and Ford. Get some of these big companies out there in a way—you don’t have to get into the details. You don’t have to get into weeds. But it kind of will be the final sweep. I would say use your consumer clout.

These companies care a lot about what their consumers think. They particularly care what young consumers think. If you’re writing and calling and saying, “Why are you so silent on climate? You have good climate policies. Why don’t you ever speak about it?” it shouldn’t be a big shift for these companies. They’re already in the right place.

They just haven’t lit up their communications and government relations side with where their corporate and sustainability people already are.

Michael: Yes. Yes. That’s great. I had never thought of that. Absolutely, I’ll include that as part of the message. Just in beginning to wind down, I’d like to ask you a question that Connie, my wife, has asked me to ask the participants in this series, and it has been fun, because it’s sort of off the wall, but it also really can get at some interesting stuff.

Here’s the question. If you were to invite three people from any time in human history either to a dinner party where the three of them were all at—so all four of you at the same time—or just a one on one where you’re having a meal or a cup of coffee or a beer with any three people in history, who would you ask? Who would you want to have that conversation with, and why?

Sheldon: I would obviously want to—Ben Franklin and Abraham Lincoln would be two right off the bat. Then I’d be interested in trying to find a woman in history who had made a big mark, whether it was Joan of Arc or a great scientist who had to break through, just to hear a little bit more about what it was like then.

Right now we still have glass ceilings and pay inequity, but 100, 200, 500 years ago, it was a very, very different world. It would be fascinating to hear that perspective brought into this time. But particularly I’d like to have Ben Franklin. He was asked after the constitutional convention by a woman outside, “Mr. Franklin, what have you done in there? What have you given us?”

He said, “A Republic, ma’am, if you can keep it.” To have him look at how well we’ve kept the Republic I think would be interesting. But I’d settle for Jefferson or Madison. Actually, I’d probably take Madison before Jefferson.

Michael: Yes. I’m reminded, just yesterday I read a piece on climate progress—I think Joe Roman wrote it—on Thomas Jefferson’s whole notion of usufruct. It wasn’t his notion. It has been around for a couple thousand years. But the sense that this moral obligation to only use the land—and, of course, any resources you could put this to—but to only use the land in a way that doesn’t diminish the quality of the land for future generations.

I think that we need to resurrect that concept of usufruct, whether we call it that or something else. But this sense of moral responsibility to not live in the present in a way that diminishes the quality of future. If anything is a moral evil, it seems to me that has got to be included.

Sheldon: Yes. It really is. It’s just your victims aren’t around to defend themselves. They haven’t arrived on the planet yet, but you know they’re going to, because we all keep having children. Unless you think that’s going to stop somehow, humans be out there, and we will have hurt them. That is a wrong.

One thing I’d add to the conversation we’ve had so far, you mentioned the use of the land. I think when we talk about climate, we really need to remember the oceans. We need to remember the oceans, because that’s probably the first and biggest blow that human kind will get, will be through an ocean’s vector, probably from acidification and warming, but we’ll see.

On Rhode Island, we’re 10 inches higher along the coast than we were when the famous hurricane of 1938 struck and did so much damage. You can only imagine what it would do if 10 more inches stacked up by storm surge to throw at our coasts. Finally, the oceans bear true witness. You can get into this atmospheric climate modeling.

It’s all computer driven and all of the deniers take you there, because it is confusing and it does require a lot of expertise. If you want to so doubt, you go to a complicated area and you throw simple-minded observations around that take a lot of information to rebut, and people don’t have information, so they give up and you win by sowing doubt.

Not at the oceans. Not at the oceans. You go to the tide gauge of Fort Pulaski, you go to the tide gauge of Naval Station Newport. It’s up 10 inches. You measure it basically with a yardstick. It’s not complicated. The temperature in Narragansett Bay from a little bit before my wife and I were jumping into it is up three to four degrees in the mean winter water temperature.

Simple. It’s a thermometer. Nobody can deny that. It’s measurement. Finally, the acidification, anybody who keeps an aquarium, does litmus tests of the acidity of the aquarium

water, it's no more complicated than that. When you're looking at sea level rise, ocean warming, and ocean acidification, there's no room for doubt. There's no room for debate.

They really can't deny it, and that's why they never talk about it. Then we follow them into the conversation on the most complicated ground rather than stand and say, "No, let's talk about oceans, and you tell me how you can explain why we're acidifying at the fastest rate in recorded history."

Michael: Senator, I'm so grateful that you've brought up that topic, because the only book on climate change—and I've read a couple dozen of them—but the only one that I've ever seen on Amazon, for example, that doesn't have any climate denialists—they just don't know how to even respond to this guy—is John Englander, a little paperback.

John Englander wrote a book. He's the former head of the Jacques Cousteau Society. His book, *High Tide on Main Street* is just a fabulous book. It exactly—the reason that the denialists can't argue with it is because it's just so compelling evidence-wise. He's actually a great writer.

Sheldon: Yes, you have to not just disbelieve science, you have to disbelieve measurement if you want to avoid the consequences of what the oceans are telling us.

Michael: Yes. Well, Senator, any last things that you would like to say just about anything related to this theme or anything that we've not covered that you'd like to just mention? Then how would people—obviously, you've got a great website, so mention that. But how would people learn more and support your work?

Sheldon: The thing that I would want to urge people to do is to get involved. I believe in my heart of hearts that we are tipping in the right direction on this, that society is moving, that the political castle of denial is built on sand and you can actually watch it crumble and creak. It's only a matter of time before it falls.

People should be confident that this is a winning fight to get into. They should be confident that now is the time to either get into it or to raise your participation a little bit and have confidence that we will be doing the right thing and it really will make a difference. This is not banging your head against the wall.

Washington is not hopelessly in the thrall of the polluters. This can be broken. It is happening. We're on our way to doing it. We need to have that confidence. We need to have that energy. We need to have that feeling of onward to battle. I'm kind of a Johnny Appleseed of optimism about being able to have the law change so that the market works, so that natural innovation and human energy lead us out of this and that we do the right thing and don't dishonor our grandchildren and their grandchildren.

Michael: Yes. Amen. Wow, what a powerful note to conclude on. Well, Senator, thank you so much for taking the time to be in this conversation, but for far more than that. Thank you for being a stand in the United States Senate for taking aggressive and important action to ensure that future generations look back with a sense of gratitude for those of us that participated and made the changes, even where sometimes it was a sacrifice.

But I think that's what all greatness is, is not just pursuing your own self-centered needs, but really being a blessing, being a contribution to others and to the future. So thank you for your role in that.

Sheldon: Thank you for what you're doing. You have thrown yourself into this wholeheartedly. You are making a difference. You're going all over the place and really putting yourself out there. As you know, the skeptics can be raucous and cynical and mean spirited and bumping up against them isn't always pleasant.

But you know when you're right and you know what needs to be done and you're really making a terrific contribution. So thank you.

Michael: Thank you. I'll contact your staff, because when Connie and I, when we arrive into Washington, DC in November, if you're around I'd love to come by.

Sheldon: It will be my pleasure. Thank you, Michael.

Michael: Thank you. Thank you, Senator.