

Committee on Foreign Relations; Dianne Feinstein, chairman, and Saxby Chambliss, vice chairman, Senate Committee on Intelligence; Patrick J. Leahy, chairman, and Charles E. Grassley, ranking member, Senate Committee on the Judiciary; Howard P. “Buck” McKeon, chairman, and Adam Smith, ranking member, House Committee on Armed Services; Edward R. Royce, chairman, and Eliot L. Engel, ranking

member, House Committee on Foreign Affairs; Michael J. Rogers, chairman, and C.A. “Dutch” Ruppersberger, ranking member, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence; Robert W. Goodlatte, chairman, and John Conyers, Jr., ranking member, House Committee on the Judiciary; and David L. Camp, chairman, and Sander M. Levin, ranking member, House Committee on Ways and Means.

The President’s Weekly Address

May 31, 2014

Hi, everybody. I’m here at Children’s National Medical Center in Washington, DC, visiting with some kids being treated here all the time for asthma and other breathing problems. Often, these illnesses are aggravated by air pollution, pollution from the same sources that release carbon and contribute to climate change. And for the sake of all our kids, we’ve got to do more to reduce it.

Earlier this month, hundreds of scientists declared that climate change is no longer a distant threat, it “has moved firmly into the present.” Its costs can be measured in lost lives and livelihoods, lost homes and businesses, and higher prices for food, insurance, and rebuilding.

That’s why, last year, I put forward America’s first Climate Action Plan. This plan cuts carbon pollution by building a clean energy economy: using more clean energy, less dirty energy, and wasting less energy throughout our economy.

One of the best things we can do for our economy, our health, and our environment is to lead the world in producing cleaner, safer energy. And we’re already generating more clean energy than ever before. Thanks in part to the investments we made in the Recovery Act, the electricity America generates from wind has tripled. And from the sun, it’s increased more than tenfold. In fact, every 4 minutes, another American home or business goes solar. And every panel is pounded into place by a worker whose job cannot be shipped overseas.

We’re wasting less energy too. We doubled down how far our cars and trucks will go on a gallon of gas by the middle of the next decade, saving you money at the pump, and we’re helping families and businesses save billions with more efficient homes, buildings, and appliances.

This strategy has created jobs, grown our economy, and helped make America more energy independent than we’ve been in decades, all while holding our carbon emissions to levels not seen in about 20 years. It’s a good start. But for the sake of our children, we have to do more.

This week, we will. Today, about 40 percent of America’s carbon pollution comes from power plants. But right now there are no national limits to the amount of carbon pollution that existing plants can pump into the air we breathe. None. We limit the amount of toxic chemicals like mercury, sulfur, and arsenic that power plants put in our air and water. But they can dump unlimited amounts of carbon pollution into the air. It’s not smart, it’s not safe, and it doesn’t make sense.

That’s why, a year ago, I directed the Environmental Protection Agency to build on the efforts of many States, cities, and companies and come up with commonsense guidelines for reducing dangerous carbon pollution from our power plants. This week, we’re unveiling these proposed guidelines, which will cut down on the carbon pollution, smog, and soot that threaten the health of the most vulnerable Americans, including children and the elderly. In just the first year that these standards go into effect, up to 100,000 asthma attacks and

2,100 heart attacks will be avoided, and those numbers will go up from there.

These standards were created in an open and transparent way, with input from the business community. States and local governments weighed in too. In fact, nearly a dozen States are already implementing their own market-based programs to reduce carbon pollution. And over a thousand mayors have signed agreements to cut their cities' carbon pollution.

So the idea of setting higher standards to cut pollution at our power plants is not new. It's just time for Washington to catch up with the rest of the country. Now, special interests and their allies in Congress will claim that these guidelines will kill jobs and crush the economy. Let's face it, that's what they always say.

But every time America has set clear rules and better standards for our air, our water, and our children's health, the warnings of the cynics and the naysayers have been wrong. They warned that doing something about the smog choking our cities and acid rain poisoning our lakes would kill business. It didn't. Our air got cleaner, acid rain was cut dramatically, and our economy kept growing.

These excuses for inaction somehow suggest a lack of faith in American businesses and American ingenuity. The truth is, when we ask our workers and businesses to innovate, they do. When we raise the bar, they meet it. When we restricted cancer-causing chemicals in plastics and leaded fuel in our cars, American chemists came up with better substitutes. When we phased out the gases that depleted the ozone layer, American workers built better

refrigerators and air conditioners. The fuel standards we put in place a few years ago didn't cripple automakers; the American auto industry retooled, and today, they're selling the best cars in the world, with more hybrids, plug-in, and fuel-efficient models to choose from than ever before.

In America, we don't have to choose between the health of our economy and the health of our children. The old rules may say we can't protect our environment and promote economic growth at the same time, but in America, we've always used new technology to break the old rules.

As President and as a parent, I refuse to condemn our children to a planet that's beyond fixing. The shift to a cleaner energy economy won't happen overnight, and it will require tough choices along the way. But a low-carbon, clean energy economy can be an engine of growth for decades to come. America will build that engine. America will build the future: a future that's cleaner, more prosperous, and full of good jobs; a future where we can look our kids in the eye and tell them we did our part to leave them a safer, more stable world.

Thanks, and have a great weekend.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 3:45 p.m. on May 30 in a wet lab at the Children's National Medical Center's Sheikh Zayed Institute for Pediatric Surgical Innovation for broadcast on May 31. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 30, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on May 31.

Statement on the Release of Sergeant Bowe R. Bergdahl, USA, From Captivity by Taliban Forces in Afghanistan *May 31, 2014*

Today the American people are pleased that we will be able to welcome home Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, held captive for nearly 5 years. On behalf of the American people, I was honored to call his parents to express our joy that they can expect his safe return, mindful of

their courage and sacrifice throughout this ordeal. Today we also remember the many troops held captive and whom remain missing or unaccounted for in America's past wars. Sergeant Bergdahl's recovery is a reminder of America's unwavering commitment to leave no