

given country, region, and throughout the continent.

Finally, the Congress needs to be prepared to support this new effort. It will be essential that Congress take into account the needs of the Defense Department and the individual uniformed services as this new command is created. But it is equally essential that Congress take into account the needs of the State Department, USAID, and other agencies that are trying to ramp up their efforts throughout the continent. If anything, the creation of a new combatant command for Africa should signal the dramatically increasing importance of Africa to our national security, and that to truly address the range of challenges present there we need to look at an equally aggressive plan to strengthen our diplomatic, development, humanitarian, and human rights work throughout the continent. This may include addressing how the Congress allocates funds—both to this new command and to the other departments and agencies that will make the spirit and intent of this command work.

In closing, we must focus greater resources on Africa but we should ensure that our efforts in Africa do not become primarily military in nature, and that the State Department continues to play the primary leadership role with respect to our efforts on the continent. Those within the Defense Department, the State Department, at USAID and other key departments and agencies will need to use this as an opportunity to evaluate and enhance the way they do business. The success of this governmental effort requires it, and our national security depends on it.

COAL TO LIQUIDS FUEL PRODUCTION ACT

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, I am pleased to join my distinguished colleague, the Senator from Kentucky, Mr. BUNNING, in introducing this important legislation.

The geologic deposit known as Illinois Basin Coal—which lies beneath Illinois, Indiana and Kentucky—has more untapped energy potential than the combined oil reserves of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. This coal deposit underlies more than 65 percent of the surface of the State of Illinois, with recoverable reserves estimated to be in excess of 38 billion tons from my State alone. Moreover, with just a glance at a map of Illinois, one can see that my State is dotted with towns that reflect our 200-year coal mining history—towns with names like Carbondale, Energy, Carbon Hill, Coal City, and Zeigler.

In some parts of Illinois, however, these names are just shadows of the past. More than 15 years ago, upon the enactment of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, coal mining in Illinois was drastically transformed. Given the high sulfur content of Illi-

nois coal, many users switched from Illinois coal to other, lower sulfur coals mined out West. As a result, thousands of Illinois jobs vanished, and with it, the life force of many of these towns. Air quality throughout the Nation improved drastically, but vast energy resources were rendered idle, awaiting new future technologies.

Today, we are exploring those new technologies, which promise a renaissance for coal communities. Two east central Illinois towns, for example, are under consideration for the billion-dollar FutureGen project, which many of my colleagues know will be the first near zero-emissions coal-fired power-plant in the world.

But coal from the Illinois Basin, with its high energy content, is a superb feedstock not just for power generation, as promised by FutureGen, but also for the manufacture of Fischer-Tropsch—FT—fuel. Created in the 1920s by German scientists and used during World War II, the FT process is the major fuel source for vehicles in South Africa. In both nations, the production of diesels from coal was developed as a response to petroleum embargoes against those nations at various points in their history.

Meanwhile, in the United States, more than 55 percent of our fuel consumption continues to come from foreign oil, and that number is growing. Our economy is exposed to potential jeopardy from oil supply disruptions and price shocks. We must diversify our fuel supply, and that means all domestic options should be on the table for consideration.

Fischer-Tropsch fuel is interchangeable with standard diesel, functioning in existing engines with little or no modification. FT fuels can be transported in our existing fuel distribution infrastructure. Moreover, FT fuels have far lower emissions than standard diesel. The Department of Defense, the largest consumer of petroleum in the United States, has great interest in acquiring this fuel. But Fischer-Tropsch is not manufactured in the U.S., and no focused federal initiatives exist to encourage the development of a Fischer-Tropsch manufacturing base.

The bill introduced by Senator BUNNING and myself will provide that Federal focus. This bill will help to create a new market for abandoned and abundant Illinois Basin coal, revitalizing economic development and jobs in the coal communities of our States. It will help develop the capital infrastructure for producing FT fuels at the levels necessary for preliminary testing by the Department of Defense and for the private sector. It will explore carbon sequestration for this technology before we can pursue construction. And it will play a key role in reducing our Nation's dependence on foreign oil.

I know that there are no perfect answers in the pursuit of energy independence. There is no single fuel or feedstock that offers affordability, reliability, transportability, and sensi-

tivity to the environment in equal ways. But, as we pursue the best course of action for our energy independence, we cannot delay action until we reach the perfect solution. Maintaining our dependency on unstable regions of the world for the fuel that we cannot live without is far too great a risk. Actions taken today must be accompanied by rigorous concurrent debate in preparation for the second and third generation choices of our alternative fuel infrastructure.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

60TH BIRTHDAY OF THE NORTH DAKOTA AIR NATIONAL GUARD

- Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, January 16, 2007, is a special day for North Dakota.

It is the 60th birthday of the North Dakota Air National Guard. It will also mark a major milestone in the history of the North Dakota Air National Guard. On that day the 119th Fighter Wing will conduct a ceremony honoring the final flight of their F-16s, closing out an illustrious history of flying fighter aircraft in defense of our country.

On that day, the 119th Fighter Wing will also introduce the public to its two new missions, operating Predator unmanned aerial systems and flying light transport aircraft.

The North Dakota Air National Guard began on January 16, 1947. The first Air Guard squadron organized in North Dakota was the 178th Fighter Squadron in Fargo. The first meetings were held in the Army National Guard Armory in downtown Fargo but the squadron moved to Hector Airport by the end of the year.

Duane Larson was the squadron commander during the 1950s. He was nicknamed “Pappy” because he was the senior fighter pilot. The squadron started calling themselves Pappy Larson and his Happy Hooligans after an old comic strip. The squadron has been called the Happy Hooligans ever since.

The Happy Hooligans began operations with the P-51D Mustang. They flew the Mustang until 1954. After that they flew F-94s, F-89s, F-102s, F-101B Voodoos and F-4D Phantoms. Since 1990, they have flown F-16s.

On April 1, 1951, the Hooligans were mobilized for Federal service and ordered to active duty during the Korean conflict. When they were demobilized in 1954, they were put on alert to defend against an attack by the Soviet Union. At first, the alert consisted of aircraft on the main ramp of Hector Field with aircrew sleeping in a nearby building on base.

The alert mission was supposed to be a temporary mission for the Happy Hooligans. It was only supposed to last

6 months to a year. It turned into a 52 year stint. From 1954 to 2006, the North Dakota Air National Guard flew alert in more than a dozen states and nearly a dozen nations.

In 1998 the Happy Hooligans established a permanent alert detachment of F-16s, pilots and ground crews at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia. Their mission was to provide air defense for Washington, DC, and other locations along the eastern seaboard. That mission came to an end on October 12, 2006.

I cannot talk about the Happy Hooligans alert mission without mentioning the events of 9/11.

The attack on the World Trade Center in New York precipitated an order for the fighters of 119th Fighter Wing's alert detachment to scramble from Langley. Three North Dakota Air National Guard F-16s took to the air, but regrettably they were not yet over Washington's airspace when American Airlines flight 77 hit the Pentagon. They were still some minutes away. But they then flew, as I understand it, 7 or 8 hours that day performing combat air patrol over the skies of Washington, DC.

In the shock of that morning, I have to tell you that I will never forget what it meant to look up to the bright blue September morning sky and see F-16 fighter planes flying air cover over the Nation's Capitol. We found out later those were the Happy Hooligans from Fargo, ND.

The Happy Hooligans are folks who farm; run drug stores; teach school. They do a lot of things in their community. But they also are members of an Air National Guard unit that maintains and flies aircraft. And they do that better than anybody.

For almost 60 years the Happy Hooligans have ranked with the best fighter pilots in the world. They have flown in contests against the world's top combat pilots, and they have brought the trophies home to Fargo, ND, as proof that they are the best fighter pilots in the world.●

Several years ago, USA Today wrote about the Happy Hooligans. It called them the "Godfathers of air superiority." It said, "When you strap one of these senior fliers into the cockpit of an F-16 Fighting Falcon, the younger boys get out of the way because these are the best air-to-air combat fighters in the world."

That article was about one of the three times that the 119th Fighter Wing won the Air Force's William Tell competition.

William Tell is the U.S. Air Force's foremost air-to-air competition. It is the Super Bowl of air superiority. F-16 units are not supposed to win it. Reserve component units are not supposed to win it. F-15 teams from active Air Force wings are supposed to win it. But someone must have forgotten to tell this to the Happy Hooligans.

So this National Guard unit from Fargo, ND, has taken its airplanes to the William Tell contest, and they

have flown against the world's top combat pilots, and they have brought the William Tell Award home to Fargo, ND, three times, as proof that they are the best fighter pilots in the world.

The Happy Hooligans have also won the Hughes Trophy twice. That award recognizes the outstanding air-to-air unit in the country. It too has been dominated by F-15s. The 119th is the only F-16 unit that has ever won it.

Alongside their flying record, the Happy Hooligans also have an unmatched safety record.

Since 1973, they have flown more than 150,000 hours in F-101s, F-4s and F-16s without a single major accident. That amount of flight time translates to about 17 accident-free years in the air.

That is the longest continuous period of safe fighter aircraft operations for any Air National Guard fighter unit and one of best safety records in U.S. Air Force history. In March 2006, the 119th Fighter Wing was recognized for flying its F-16s for a total of 70,000 hours in 3,920 individual sorties without mishap. That is also a record.

All those trophies and records are a testament to the thousands of men and women who have served in the North Dakota Air National Guard since 1947. The pilots make the headlines but they would not get off the ground without all the other people in the unit.

U.S. defense policy is changing, and the role of the Happy Hooligans is going to change with it.

But make no mistake about it: the 119th Wing will still lead the way, doing its job for America.

The Happy Hooligans are going to accept their new missions of controlling unmanned aerial vehicles and flying the future Joint Cargo Aircraft with the same enthusiasm and professionalism as they flew fighters. And they will perform those missions better than anyone else in the country. Because that is the way they do everything.●

HONORING CORTLANDT DIETLER

• Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, I would like to recognize Cortlandt Dietler, a great Coloradan who tonight is receiving the National Western Stock Show's 2007 Citizen of the West award. This is an honor befitting a man whose life and career exemplify the Western values of independence, hard work, and humility.

A native Coloradan, Cort is a pioneer in the oil industry and has helped make Denver an energy center for our Nation. He began his career with ARAMCO in Lebanon in 1947, and has been involved with more than 30 energy companies since, many of which he has led or has founded. Today, he is the chairman of TransMontaigne Inc, a petroleum product distribution and marketing company which he founded. He is so respected in his industry that his peers have honored him repeatedly; in 1976 the Denver Petroleum Club named

him the Oil Man of the Year, in 1986 the Colorado Petroleum Association named him the Pioneer Oil Man of the Year, and in 2003 the Independent Petroleum Association of the Mountain States selected him as the Wildcatter of the Year.

I have known Cort to be a spirited contributor to his community. He lends his expertise to organizations like the Denver Art Museum, the El Pomar Foundation, and the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association. He is generous as a philanthropist and has a candid voice on the shared challenges we face.

While Cort has worked primarily in the oil industry, he has also worked in ranching and with the National Western Stock Show for many years. He and a partner ran a cattle operation in the Eagle River Valley, near Vail, and bred thoroughbreds for racing.

He is being honored today because he epitomizes the values which are so central to Western life—he has worked hard, acted ethically, and served his community with humility and honor. Cort belongs among the select group of leaders who have received this award, and I congratulate him on this honor.●

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Ms. Evans, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The nominations received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 5:43 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Niland, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 2. An act to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to provide for an increase in the Federal minimum wage.

ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

The President pro tempore (Mr. BYRD) reported that he had signed the following enrolled bill, which was previously signed by the Speaker of the House:

S. 159. An act to redesignate the White Rocks National Recreation Area in the State of Vermont as the "Robert T. Stafford White Rocks National Recreation Area".

MEASURES READ THE FIRST TIME

The following bill was read the first time: