

fee. If you contribute more than \$2,500 to a Flexible Spending Account, your taxes go up. Many taxpayers who purchase over-the-counter medicine will now see them taxed. Taxes and transparency—two issues.

I will continue, in the weeks ahead, as will my colleagues, to discuss the dangers of health care reform done wrong. Health care reform is needed, no doubt about it, but not rushed legislation with no transparency and so many new taxes on the middle class.

I will wrap up with this. I think overhauling 16 percent of the economy is too important to do fast and to not do right, so I respectfully suggest that we take the time to do it right and honor the pledges made.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

Mr. BURRIS. Mr. President, over the last few months I have addressed this Chamber many times on the need for a strong public option as part of our health reform legislation. The need, I believe, is quite clear, but the controversy remains. There are some who continue to attack the public option as a "government takeover," or an unnecessary intrusion into the free market. We must not be deceived by these baseless attacks. They are the instrument of a political opposition that cannot win this argument on the merits.

The American people know this better than anyone. They recognize that our health care system is broken and that they must not settle for anything less than comprehensive reform that only a public option can provide. They know that the insurance companies maintain a virtual monopoly over regional markets and that large corporations are squeezing families and businesses for extraordinary profits. Those who oppose reform see no problem with this lack of competition and accountability and that is why their arguments fall short. That is why their talking points seem tired and disingenuous, because they are out of touch with what is going on in America today.

Let's reject the constraints of partisanship. Let's shut out the lobbyists and special interest groups that stand to profit from the poor health of hard-working Americans. Let's talk about why we desperately need a strong public option in this country right now.

The key problem with health coverage today is that American consumers do not have any options. The principles of competition and choice have always been at the heart of our economic system. They have driven innovation and they have served as the foundation of so many great ideas and achievements throughout our history. In many ways, these principles are uniquely American. Yet the health industry is somewhat exempt from their influence. Private insurance companies are free to fix prices, monopolize local markets and deny coverage to almost anyone for almost any reason. We have

seen unprecedented consolidations in the insurance market and that has led to a lack of competition and choice for American consumers.

In the past 13 years, there have been more than 400 corporate mergers involving health insurers. As a result, 94 percent of our Nation's markets are now considered "highly concentrated," meaning that they are post-antitrust concerns. In my home State of Illinois, just two companies control 69 percent of the market and, sadly, Illinois is far from alone. In Alabama, a single company controls more than almost 90 percent of the market and in Iowa, Rhode Island, Arkansas, Hawaii, Alaska, Vermont, Wyoming, Maine, and Montana, the two largest health insurance companies control at least 80 percent of the market. In fact, there are only three States in the entire country where the largest three companies control less than a half of the insurance market.

This is a staggering statistic. In that kind of highly concentrated environment, there is no incentive to compete. There is no reason to improve service, expand access, or work with patients and doctors to achieve better health outcomes. In fact, there is every incentive to do just the opposite. These companies continue to look for new, innovative ways to deny coverage to sick Americans. They increase premiums, they cap lifetime benefits, they increase corporate earnings at the expense of families and businesses that are already stretched to the breaking point. While the rest of us suffer the effects of recession, they post record profits. That is why health care premiums are growing four times faster than wages. That is why profits are up and, relatively, health outcomes are down.

In the last quarter, one major insurance company reported profits that had more than doubled when compared to the same quarter last year. In fact, between 2000 and 2007, 10 of the country's top insurance companies increased their profits by an average of 428 percent.

Today, \$1 out of every \$6 spent in this country goes to pay for health care. This is wrong. This flies in the face of every value our Nation holds so dear.

It is time to stand up for the American people and restore the American values of competition and choice to the system. It is time to hold insurance companies accountable. It is time to create a strong public option that will make insurers compete for your business, like any other corporation in America.

There is nothing wrong with making a fair profit. I understand that. I have been in business myself. They have to make a profit. But there is nothing fair about creating a monopoly and then wringing money from the sick Americans who are counting on you in their hour of need.

That is why we need a strong public option. We cannot have real reform

without competition and we cannot have competition without a public option. A strong public option would be a self-sustaining, would provide a low-cost alternative to private companies, and would force them to improve their product or risk losing customers. The public option would give people a choice for the first time in many years. No one would be forced to change their coverage, but if their current provider isn't treating them right, they deserve the opportunity to choose something better and more affordable.

The American people deserve the chance to shop around, to compare options and pick the plan that is right for themselves and their families or small businesses. That is what the public option would mean for Americans. That is why I will not settle for anything less. I will not compromise. I will not stop fighting. The good hard-working people in Illinois and across America demand the real reform that a strong public option would provide.

Now is not the time to back down. Now is the time to act with conviction. I urge my colleagues to join me in standing up for choice and competition in the health insurance industry. Let us rise to this challenge and include a strong public option in the reform bill we send to the President.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. UDALL of New Mexico). The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, this is the week of two more 1,000-page bills. The House has produced a nearly 2,000-page health care bill which we are all looking forward to reading. The Senator from New Mexico and I are members of the Environment and Public Works Committee, and this week we have been spending almost all day each day on a nearly 1,000-page bill on climate change.

As I said on Tuesday when the bill was presented, I have no problem acknowledging the problem, but I do have a problem with the proposed solution. The National Academies of Science of 11 major industrialized countries, including the United States, have said that climate change is real and that humans are causing most of the recent warming. If fire chiefs with the same reputation said my house was likely to burn down, I would buy some fire insurance. I would buy fire insurance that worked. But I wouldn't buy insurance so expensive that I couldn't pay my mortgage or I couldn't pay my hospital bill. That is my concern about the

solution that is a part of the Kerry-Boxer bill which we have been working on this week.

The Kerry-Boxer bill is a high-cost clean energy plan that will make it hard for Americans to support their families.

When the Boxer-Kerry cap-and-trade Bill is put together with the Energy Committee's Renewable Electricity Standard, it will be even bigger. It will be a combination of an economy-wide cap and trade and narrowly defined energy mandate. It will be a 1,000-page-plus bill of taxes, mandates, and surprises. But some things will not be a surprise.

We have heard this week a good deal of detail about the costs. At a time of 10 percent unemployment in America—and that is likely to continue for a while—it will impose a new national energy tax that will raise utility bills and send manufacturing jobs overseas looking for cheap energy. It will collect hundreds of billions of dollars each year from American taxpayers for use in a Washington slush fund for politicians to play with. Already we have corporations all over the country with their hands out looking for their share.

The economy-wide cap-and-trade, as has been said before our committee by very distinguished scientists, will be ineffective against fuel. Fuel is 30 percent of our carbon emitted today, which is a contributor to global warming. So the idea is that we put cap and trade on carbon, and it raises the price of fuel. But the testimony before our committee has been that it doesn't do much to reduce carbon emissions because even the large price increase in gasoline, for example, which will be passed on to those of us who drive cars, trucks, and fly in airplanes, would not be enough. It will be enough to cause a lot of pain, but it would not change much human behavior and reduce the amount of fuel consumed. The net result is higher prices but the same emissions.

The EPA has done a quick look at this nearly 1,000-page bill. Its conclusion is that its costs and benefits are much like the Waxman-Markey bill passed by the House of Representatives a few months ago. We know what people have said about that bill. President Obama's Budget Director, Peter Orszag, said in March that by giving the allowances to industry for free—instead of auctioning them—would result in the "largest corporate welfare program in history." That is President Obama's Budget Director.

The Congressional Budget Office said that the House-passed Waxman-Markey bill would cut up to 3.5 percent of our GDP by 2050. In other words, it will make us poorer than we would otherwise be. The Brookings Institute said the cost is likely to be \$300 billion annually by 2030. Former Senator Wirth of Colorado has criticized the bill as a cap-and-tax revenue raiser and said instead, it ought to focus primarily on utilities. James Hansen at NASA, who

feels passionately about climate change and believes it is a problem, as I do, says the bill is less than worthless.

So taken altogether, the strategy of this bill to deal with climate change is, taxes, expensive energy, and mandates, plus the President's goal of a national windmill policy—a combination of subsidies and incentives and mandates that would have as a goal making 20 percent of our electricity from giant wind turbines.

Mr. President, I believe our dream for energy ought to be just the reverse. We should want large amounts of reliable, clean, low-carbon, or carbon-free energy, but it should be cheap energy not deliberate high-cost energy because that is the way we create jobs and avoid hardships for American families. Our dream throughout our existence in this world has been that someday we would have cheap, energy for the people of the world so they could get out of poverty. We are fortunate in this country. We are just 5 percent of the people in the world, and we have 25 percent of the wealth, and we use about 25 percent of the energy. We should be leading the way and not have a policy that deliberately raises the price of energy. We ought to deliberately lower it.

So before we deliberately embark on a program to send manufacturing jobs overseas, which this unquestionably will—if you work in an auto plant or auto supplier plant or cement plant or aluminum plant, if this bill passes, your job is more likely to go overseas. Before we deliberately make ourselves poorer, we should try a low-cost strategy, and we have one.

Republicans—all 40 Republicans—have a 4-point, low-cost clean energy strategy, which I believe many Democrats agree with, and I believe President Obama agrees with a lot of it. So rather than this economy-wide, high-cost energy strategy, why not the following 4-point strategy:

No. 1, create the environment in which we could build 100 new nuclear powerplants in the next 20 years. That is the same number we have today—104. We built those in 20 years, between 1970 and 1990. Those plants produce 70 percent of our carbon-free electricity today. Wind and all of the renewable energies—except for hydropower produce 4 percent. So 100 more nuclear powerplants is No. 1.

No. 2, electrify half our cars and trucks in the next 20 years. This can happen. Almost every major automobile manufacturer is making hybrid-electric cars today. I drive a plug-in hybrid. I plug it in every night when I go home, and I put gas in my car about every 6 weeks. So we can electrify half our cars and trucks in 20 years. We can do it by plugging them in at night, when we have so much spare electricity. We can do it without building one new powerplant. That is according to the testimony of a former Brookings Institute scholar who is now in the Obama administration as Assistant Secretary of Energy.

No. 3, we can explore offshore for low-carbon natural gas and for our own oil. Natural gas has suddenly become in abundant supply, and the price is low. We can use more of it for energy, for electricity. We need to be careful with that. We did that once before and the price went up to \$15. But we have a new abundant supply of natural gas. It is our own and it is not overseas. We should find it and use it. It is low carbon. While we are at it, we should find our oil. Even if we drive half our electric cars—which will reduce our oil from overseas by one-third—we will still be using 12 or 13 million barrels of oil a day just for transportation, and we will be better off if we use our oil instead of oil from places overseas, from countries who don't like us.

The fourth item is to launch four mini Manhattan Projects like the one we had in World War II. Secretary Chu, the distinguished physicist who is President Obama's Secretary of Energy, calls them "innovation hubs." We can launch four Mini Manhattan Projects, or innovation hubs, to find ways to recapture carbon from coal plants. We know how to take nitrogen, sulfur, and mercury out of coal plants. We need to find a commercially viable way to take the carbon out.

A mini Manhattan Project could make solar power costs competitive. Today, it costs four or five times as much as other electricity. It is too expensive to use in a widespread way.

Germany, which has invested much of its future in solar power, gets less than 1 percent of its electricity from solar power. We are nearly at zero in the United States. We need a mini Manhattan Project to make electric batteries better so that our cars can go 400 miles instead of 100 miles with electricity, a mini Manhattan Project to recycle used nuclear fuel in a way that doesn't isolate plutonium.

This strategy, as I said, is supported by all 40 Senate Republicans, and many Democrats and, I believe, some of that the President embraces: nuclear powerplants, electric cars, offshore exploration for natural gas and oil, and double energy R&D for four mini Manhattan Projects for carbon recapture, solar power, electric batteries, and recycling used nuclear fuel. This strategy doesn't drive manufacturing jobs overseas. It doesn't put an ineffective cap and trade program on fuel and raise the price of gasoline without reducing much carbon.

That is much better than a national windmill policy, which is what the Obama administration and our current subsidies basically have in store for our future. Let me say what I mean by that. To produce an additional 20 percent of our electricity from nuclear power, we would need 100 new nuclear reactors on 100 square miles. Most of them could be built on sites where we now have reactors. We have been doing this successfully since the 1950s. We have a nuclear Navy. We produce 19 percent of our electricity from the 104

reactors we have today. But the proposal of the administration is to build 20 percent of our electricity from wind power. That would require 186,000 50-story wind turbines whose blades are the size of a football field. It would require 19,000 miles of new transmission lines from remote places, through your backyard, over your scenic viewscape, to bring that electricity to your house. It would require \$170 billion in taxpayer subsidies over the next 10 years, while the subsidy for the same amount of nuclear power would be about \$6.8 billion, according to current law.

It would turn our ridge tops and coastlines and treasured landscapes into junkyards in the sky. According to statistics from the American Bird Conservancy these turbines could kill more than 1 million birds a year. These turbines would work one-third of the time. That means we would have to build nuclear power natural gas plants, or coal plants, to back up these 186,000 turbines that would cover an area the size of West Virginia. That is a project for our country that ranges from impractical, to expensive, to preposterous, especially when we have available the possibility of doing what we did before—adding 100 new nuclear reactors, which the rest of the world is doing.

What happened to nuclear power? If we were going to war with the successful nuclear Navy created 60 years ago and it was doing exactly what we wanted it to do as the world's leading military, with thousands of our sailors living safely on top of those reactors, why would we stop building nuclear ships and start using sailboats for our national defense? That is tantamount to what the current administration's energy policy is doing with a national windmill policy.

We should build 100 new nuclear powerplants as rapidly and as safely as we can. It is the cheapest and most reliable way to reduce carbon and deal with climate change, and it is the fastest way to do that—just as electrifying half of our cars and trucks would be a fast way to reduce foreign oil and reduce emissions in the transportation sector. We invented nuclear power. It is one of our great technologies—maybe the most important technology in the last 100 years, and we haven't built a new nuclear powerplant in 30 years—even though the old ones we have are producing 70 percent of our carbon-free electricity.

What is the rest of the world doing? China is building 132 new nuclear powerplants. The head of a French company that makes large turbines for powerplants was in my office the other day. He told me China is starting a new nuclear plant every 2 to 3 months. France is 80 percent nuclear and has among the lowest electric rates and carbon emission rates in Western Europe.

We hear a lot about green jobs. Spain has a lot of green jobs. Unfortunately, many of the rest of Spain's jobs are

going to France because the electricity rates are lower in France, and they are high in Spain because they favor unreliable and expensive renewable electricity over nuclear power. Japan is 35 percent nuclear and growing. Taiwan, India, and the United Arab Emirates are building them. Russia is building two nuclear plants a year so they can use their natural gas as currency with the rest of Europe. But we invented nuclear technology and we haven't started a new nuclear powerplant in 30 years.

Why don't we go full speed ahead? We believe this is a more sensible, practical, low-cost solution for dealing with climate change. I will speak for myself; we have many different views on climate change in the Republican caucus. We have the whole spectrum. Not everybody agrees with me that it is a real problem and humans are causing it and we ought to deal with it as rapidly as we reasonably can. But here is the way we should do it.

If we, by 2030, build 100 new nuclear plants, and if we electrify half of our cars and trucks, we would be producing about 40 percent of our electricity from nuclear. Natural gas would be about 25 percent, hydro would be 10, wind and solar maybe 5 to 10. With these two efforts—nuclear power and electric cars—we would reach the Kyoto protocol goals for carbon emissions by 2030 without a significant increase in energy prices.

If in the meantime our mini-Manhattan projects for research, solar, carbon recapture, recycling nuclear waste, and electric batteries worked, we would be even more successful in reducing emissions, all without a national energy tax.

One might say: What is going to make all that happen? I would say two words: Presidential leadership. President Obama is very persuasive. He can set a goal and mobilize the country. That is part of the President's job: See a need, develop a strategy, and persuade half of us he is right. I think he can get a lot of Democrats.

He could start removing barriers to nuclear plants, speed up approval of designs for them. If China can start them every 2 or 3 months, we ought to be able to do so as well. He could provide incentives, such as \$100 billion in loan guarantees—and those would all be paid back not just for nuclear but for all clean energy. His budget could fund the mini-Manhattan projects. Dr. CHU has recommended we do that.

At a town hall meeting recently, President Obama said the United States would be “stupid”—those were his words—not to use nuclear power. I was glad to hear him say that. I was disappointed when he went to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in New York and lectured the other countries about not doing more about climate change and he didn't mention the words “nuclear power.” Meanwhile, Chinese President Hu Jintao said his country would “vigor-

ously” develop nuclear power to combat climate change and they are building 132 nuclear plants. But I was glad to hear what President Obama said in New Orleans.

As we move through the Senate on the debate on climate change, I ask colleagues on both sides to look carefully at this economy wide cap and trade. We have had some experience with cap and trade on small dollars for coal plants and sulfur. That does not translate very well to what is being proposed here. It does not work on fuel, which is 30 percent of our carbon. It raises the price without reducing carbon emissions, it drives manufacturing jobs away, and it raises utility bills. We don't need to do it.

With Presidential leadership, we could build 100 nuclear plants, electrify half our cars and trucks, find new low-carbon natural gas, launch the mini-Manhattan projects, and meet our clean energy goals without a national energy tax, without running jobs overseas looking for cheap electricity.

All 40 Republican Senators agree with this agenda. So do many Democrats. President Obama agrees with much of it. Then why are we pushing a high-cost national energy tax and subsidizing 186,000 windmills when we should all agree on a low-cost, clean energy plan that will create good jobs and power our economy for the 21st Century?

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FRANKEN). The Senator from Pennsylvania.

FOOD SECURITY

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, last week the United Nations Food Agency announced there are now a record 1 billion people in the world who go hungry—nearly one-sixth of the world's population. The crisis that caught the world's attention last year has escalated and has had a devastating effect in all corners of the globe.

On my left is a headline from the Associated Press from a few days ago: “A Record One Billion Are Hungry, U.N. Report Says.” This chart tracks from 1969 forward. We can see where it remained relatively stable for a while and then started to pick up in the early part of this decade, to the point now it is above 1 billion and is going in the wrong direction, going far too high—1 billion people in the world hungry.

While the number of undernourished has increased steadily since the 1990s, there was a sharp spike last year due to the global food crisis. We can work to address this problem, I believe. We should work to address this problem, and I believe we must work to address this problem.

Some people might say there is a bad economy in the United States. We have other major challenges and priorities. Why should we worry or address a problem that might seem too big to deal with and it is mostly about other places, they might argue.