fraud now, particularly at a time when the new administration is vastly expanding the size and the scope of these programs. As these programs expand, so will the potential for abuse. The Treasury Department also needs to let these banks extract themselves from Government control as soon as they want to. That was the original plan the American people signed onto, and they have a right to expect that the original plan will be carried out free from fraud and abuse.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to a period of morning business for up to 30 minutes, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first half and the majority controlling the final half.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 15 minutes in morning business, and would the Chair please let me know when I have 2 minutes left.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered, and the Chair will do so.

ENERGY POLICY

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, today is Earth Day, a day of celebration of the environment and the landscape of the great American outdoors. The President is on his way to Iowa to visit a windmill factory.

It is also a good day for us in the Senate to ask, ''exactly what is our energy policy in the United States and what should it be?'' Is it a national clean energy policy; or is it a national renewable energy policy; or is it a national windmill policy? It makes a difference. Because in terms of electricity, we use about a quarter of all the electricity in the world, and our computers and our homes in the summer and winter and our factories all depend upon a generous supply of reliable, low-cost electricity. That is what we need.

I believe this is our policy, and I believe most on the Republican side believe this as well, and I hope many on the other side do too. I believe that what we should do for the foreseeable future is to produce American energy, and use less energy, and that we ought to do it as cleanly as possible, as reliably as possible, and at as low a cost as possible.

Let's see if that is what we are actually doing and if that is what the legislation we are considering would actually do. Nothing has captured the media's attention, nor the attention of those of us who are elected to office, quite so much as renewable energy. I heard the Presiding Officer make what I believe was his maiden speech on the floor of the Senate on this subject not long ago. And the President of the United States—President Obama—has talked about powering our electricity by capturing the energy of the Sun, and the wind, and the Earth.

We will be considering, within a few weeks, legislation that would require all our electric utilities to generate a portion of their electricity from a very narrowly defined group of energies—mostly the Sun, the wind, and the Earth—and we have huge subsidies, especially for windmills—billions of dollars by taxpayers. That is the subject of another speech, but last year we added another $13 billion or $14 billion in subsidies over the next 10 years that we would be giving to banks and wealthy people and others who are wind developers.

The total number is in the $25 billion to $26 billion in taxpayer money that is now going just to subsidize wind turbines. The subsidies are huge. As a country, we have gotten infatuated with energy from the Sun, the wind, and the Earth.

I went to the Oak Ridge National Laboratory a year ago and talked about the importance of a clean energy future for our country, and among the suggestions I made was that we have a new Manhattan Project (like the World War II project that created the atom bomb), or a series of mini Manhattan Projects, and that they would be directed toward such things as making solar cost competitive within 5 years. Solar energy costs three or four times as much as other energies, so the technology needs to be improved. Also, we should make advanced biofuels more of a reality. In other words, making fuel from crops that we don't eat so we don't distort the food market.

We have made some progress on renewable energy, but there is a potentially dangerous energy gap facing us in America because, today, renewable energy from the Sun, the wind, and the Earth produces 1½ percent of all the electricity we use. The President wants to double that. Well, that is 3 percent. What if we tripled it? Well, that is on up to 5 or 6 or 7 percent. What about the other 90 percent? How are we going to heat our homes and cool our homes and how are we going to keep prices low enough so our factories and jobs will stay here rather than going overseas? It will be a long time before electricity or energy from the Sun and the wind and the Earth can power this big country of ours. There will be a gap between the renewable energy we want and the reliable, low-cost energy we must have.

Congressman HEATH SHULER of North Carolina and I are co-chairs of the Tennessee Valley Authority Congressional Caucus. We went to Knoxville last week and held a very interesting forum on the renewable energy options in the Tennessee Valley Authority area. One of the two big plants that make polysilicon, which is essential for solar, provided testimony. We are very glad to see that in Tennessee. But each of those plants uses 120 megawatts of power. They will become almost immediately TVA's largest, or among their largest, customers. They need large amounts of low-cost, reliable electricity to make solar panels. Today, of course, the kind of energy President Obama wants to use only produces 1.5 percent of that needed by the United States. We need low-cost electricity for all jobs, not just green jobs.

Here is what we found that was promising—solar especially. I mentioned it cost a lot more today and that it takes up a whole large area. A nuclear powerplant might take up one square mile. The equivalent amount of solar power might take up 10 times that much area. But nevertheless, our State and the Oak Ridge Laboratory and the University of Tennessee are focused on doing our best to try to make solar cost competitive, and we should redouble that effort in this country. We should be spending our money on energy research and development for that purpose.

For example, we heard about underwater river turbines. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission says there may be 30,000 megawatts of electricity that could be produced by turbines in the Mississippi River. That would be pretty good, if it works, because the river runs all the time, unlike the Sun, which only produces energy when the Sun shines. Of course, you can't store energy from the Sun. People overlook that sometimes. You have to use it when it happens. The wind often blows at night, when we don't need it. But the river runs all day long—old man river does—and if it can produce that kind of energy, that would be promising.

Biomass may help. The Southern Companies are building a plant that would have about 100 megawatts. In our part of the world, a bad choice would be wind turbines. We have one wind plant. The problem with it is, No. 1, the wind doesn't blow, at least not enough to make much electricity. It blows 18 percent of the time in the case of TVA's one wind farm—the only wind farm in the southeastern United States.

Second, much of that is at night, when TVA has about seven nuclear powerplants worth of electricity that is unused. So TVA is wasting, in my opinion, $60 million on big wind turbines that it could be spending on conservation, nuclear power, and pollution control equipment.

More than anything else, we do not want to see giant, 500-foot wind turbines on top of the most beautiful mountains, we believe—with all respect to the Senator from New Mexico—the

most beautiful mountains at least in the eastern part of the United States. Boone Pickens was asked if he was going to put wind turbines on his ranch? He said: No, they are ugly. If they are too ugly for his ranch then they are too ugly for the Great Smokey Mountains, and they are the wrong choice for us. Solar? Yes. Underwater turbines? Yes. Biomass? Yes. There may be others, but there are good choices and there are bad choices.

The bridge to the future for clean energy means this. While we do all we can on research and development to find a way to make solar cost competitive, to find a way to create advanced biofuels, we are still going to need a lot of power. Based on what we saw in the TVA region, you could start with conservation. We use 143 percent of the national average, per person, of electricity in Tennessee. We waste a lot of electricity. If we just used the national average, that would be the same as four new nuclear plants, five coal plants the size of Bull Run and nine natural gas plants such as the ones TVA is building in Jackson. So we start with conservation.

If we are talking about fuel, the simplest and easiest thing to do on Earth Day is to recognize we could electrify half of our cars and trucks in America—that might take 20 years—but without building one single new powerplant, not one nuclear plant, not one coal plant, not one windmill on a mountaintop. We don't have to do that because, in TVA's case, they have 6,000 or 7,000 megawatts of unused electricity at night when we are all asleep and the factories are not working. So plug your car in at night at cheaper rates, bring in a lot less oil from overseas, save billions of dollars. That would take care of us for the next 20 years. That would be a smart decision to make on Earth Day.

But the other thing we need to do is recognize that, if we care about clean air, and especially if we are worried about global warming, as I am, that we have to take nuclear seriously. Nuclear plants in America produce only 20 percent of our electricity but they produce 70 percent of our carbon-free, mercury-free, nitrogen-free, sulfur-free electricity. Let me say that again. They are only 20 percent of our electricity but they are 70 percent of our clean electricity. So in the Tennessee region especially, we should not be wasting money on windmills where the wind doesn't blow and it desecrates the environment. We should be spending money on making coal plants cleaner through pollution control. We know how to do that, except for carbon. We should also build more nuclear plants and retire the dirtiest coal plants. That is the smart thing to do. And we should emphasize conservation.

My point today is simply this. I think all of us want to make sure we have a stable energy future. A stable energy future means plenty of reliable, low-cost electricity so we can heat and cool our homes and keep our jobs from going overseas. And we want to make sure it is clean. So our goals should be to produce more American energy, to make us more energy independent by electrifying our cars, to make coal clean, and to use wind and solar when it is appropriate to do that. But if we truly want to make a difference, we should build 100 new nuclear powerplants in the next 20 years, at least five or six a year, because that is the best way to have clean air. That is the best way to have low costs. And we should launch another mini-Manhattan Project and reserve a Nobel Prize for the scientist who can get rid of the carbon from existing coal plants, because coal provides half our energy. We know what to do about nitrogen, mercury, and sulfur. But we have not figured out what to do about carbon. If we did, India would also do it, China would also do it, the rest of the world would do it, and we could have low-cost energy.

I mention low cost because so often we talk about new forms of energy as if cost didn't matter. It matters to the executives who met with me yesterday from the TVA region. TVA's residential rates are low, relatively. But the industrial rates are not. If they are too high, those jobs move out of our region, maybe overseas. And last December the people in Nashville, our capital city, did not think the residential rates were so low because 10 percent of them said they were unable to pay their electric bill in December because it was too high.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator has 2 minutes remaining.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

So on Earth Day my suggestion is that, as we celebrate the day, we should ask what is our energy policy—Is it a national clean energy policy? Is it a national renewable energy policy? Is it a national windmill policy?—we should recognize there is a potentially dangerous gap between the renewable energy we want and the reliable low-cost energy we must have, and between now and then we must build a strong bridge to a clean energy future.

We can agree on conservation, but during that time we will need 100 new nuclear plants, we will need offshore drilling for oil, and fast, because we need the gas and we can't electrify all of our cars as quickly as we might like.

Earth Day is a day for celebration, but it is also a day for realism.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

GLOBAL WARMING

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Tennessee for acknowledging Earth Day. All of us are conscious of the fact that, at least over the last 30 years or so, we have begun to realize the importance of our environment and the important responsibility we have toward our environment. I am troubled by the fact that only a few weeks ago on this very Senate floor as we debated the budget resolution, amendment after amendment was offered to try to stop us from dealing with the issue of global warming. I think it is a sad commentary that still too many Senators of both political parties are looking for excuses to do nothing. We give our speeches, we acknowledge to student groups and others that we face a challenge. Yet when we have an opportunity, as we do in the Senate, to deal with that, too many of my colleagues race away. We cannot do that any longer. We owe it to future generations to make important, albeit difficult, decisions which will lead us to the point where we are resolving the challenge of global warming and climate change. These are realities. We owe nothing less to the next generation but to come up with responsible approaches to those.

The budget resolution debate of a few weeks ago was a discouraging chapter in this saga. I hope many of my colleagues will come to realize that we must accept this responsibility.

U.S. POLICY TOWARD CUBA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last month during the vote on the omnibus bill we heard the beginnings of a discussion on the best way to encourage change in Cuba. Shortly thereafter several of my colleagues, including Senators DORGAN, LUGAR, DODD, and ENZI spoke about their bill, the Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act, which I am pleased to cosponsor.

And last week President Obama announced an easing of U.S. policy toward Cuba—one that allows for, among other things, greater family travel and unlimited remittances to the island. These wise steps begin to undo decades of counterproductive policy toward Cuba.

The President's similarly timed visits to Mexico and the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad demonstrate a welcome and hopeful level of reengagement in the region—one in which we have many shared interests and challenges.

Yet the debate on U.S. policy toward Cuba raises many passions and heart felt concerns.

While all of us want to see a more open and democratic Cuba, the means to reach that goal are often vigorously debated.

I am under no illusions about the horrendous record of the Cuban regime regarding human rights and political freedom. The Castro government has regularly jailed those who oppose its rule or want even a semblance of political freedom. Many languish in inhuman conditions without trial or recourse.

According to the State Department's most recent Human Rights Report on