

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 Smoky 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 power plant, 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

Cuba, at least 205 political prisoners and detainees were in jail at the end of 2008 and as many as 5,000 citizens, including 1,000 women, served sentences this year without being charged with a specific crime.

Beatings and harassment of human rights activists and political dissidents by government-recruited mobs, police, and state security officials remain commonplace. Journalists continue to be denied the right to openly criticize their government without fear of reprisal. And domestic human rights groups are not even recognized or permitted to legally function.

We all want this to change. It must change.

Yet for almost 50 years the United States has tried the same policy with Cuba, one of isolation, and it has failed.

I wish that were not true, but it is.

I believe sanctions can be an important foreign policy tool. Their use should be carefully considered on a case by case basis.

Yet after almost half a century of a failed isolation policy in terms of Cuba, don't we owe it to ourselves and the Cuban people to rethink this issue?

I am not arguing that we lift all sanctions against Cuba. The regime must begin to release its political prisoners and implement political reforms before we take any such steps.

The Cuban government must listen to the brave voices of its own people such as Oswaldo Paya, who has collected thousands of signatures for a petition given to the Cuban government requesting greater political freedoms—a petition process that is in fact allowed for under the Cuban constitution.

But President Obama was right in beginning to change U.S. policy toward Cuba.

Cuba is no longer a serious threat to the United States; we no longer need to think in black or white Cold War terms. Since that time, we have seen globalization, an unprecedented flow of information between people in different countries, and the emergence of many new countries seeking democracy.

Why should the people of Cuba be held back from the benefits of this new world? There is already limited use of the Internet and cell phones on the island—but I bet if you ask the Cuban people, they would tell you they want more access to these links to the outside world, not less. President Obama's policy of allowing telecommunications licensing on the island should help foster such access to the outside world.

We should replace the Castro regime with an open, democratic Cuba the same way we brought down the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union. We need to expand the contact of everyday Cubans with freedom, opportunity and people whose lives are inspired by our values.

Isolation is not the answer. An invasion is the answer—but not a military invasion; the invasion of openness and freedom and new ideas.

It is not a Pollyanna-ish position to argue this. My mother was born in Lithuania. Lithuania, a Baltic nation, was under suppression by the Soviet Union after World War II, isolated, cut off from the world as was most of Eastern Europe. But then the day came when the conversation opened, when the doors opened, when the people of the Baltics and Eastern Europe could see the Western world and realize how much their lives had been denied by totalitarian rule.

I think the same thing can happen in Cuba. We should not be closing the doors to Cuba. We should throw them wide open. I had some friends who recently went to Cuba, through Mexico, with a visa. They came back and said, "You know, they are still using oxen for power in their agriculture." Yoking oxen, in the 21st century, 90 miles offshore from the United States? If they knew and could see what modern agriculture could bring to them, if they could understand what freedom meant, even more, we would have a greater chance of bringing real change to Cuba.

Earlier this year, Congress eased travel restrictions. President Obama has eased them further. The more Americans and Westerners move into Cuba, the more they will bring ideas and commerce and opportunity and change to Cuba. Isolation for 50 years has failed. Why would we cling to a failed policy?

It is a poor country, a nation that struggles with natural disasters as well as poverty of its own creation and one that would be open to change and opportunity.

I might also say that the embargo which we have imposed has hurt our chances to export food to Cuba, which is needed. We should open those opportunities in the hopes that commerce will not only feed people who are hungry but establish stronger relationships and a better understanding by the Cubans of what a free market economy could bring them. The U.S. policy of isolation strengthens the Castro dictatorship. If at a time when we should be opening the doors by closing them, we gave Castro, Fidel Castro, and his brother Raul excuses for the misfortunes that people realize in Cuba, we have an opportunity to change those things, and I certainly hope that we do.

It was interesting to me when the President of the United States went down for this Summit of the Americas, the biggest story that came out of it was the fact that he was not rude to Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, that he actually shook his hand and took a book from him.

Some of the cold warriors that I hear on television, the commentators just cannot get over that. They cannot imagine that we would change a foreign policy that we have had over the Bush administration years, a policy that sadly did not reach its intended goals of better relationships and better respect around the world.

President Obama is opening negotiations and conversations with countries

around the world and creating an opportunity, an opportunity for new freedom, an opportunity for new strength, and a new image of the United States. It may trouble some of the cold warriors of years gone by who want confrontation and lack of communication, but that certainly does not serve the needs of the 21st century.

I welcome this change that President Obama has brought to Washington. I welcome this opening of foreign policy in the hope that his approach and his image and status in the world will bring us to a safer place in the 21st century.

I yield the floor.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, what is the parliamentary situation?

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BENNET.) The Senate is in morning business with 5 minutes remaining under the majority's control.

Mr. LEAHY. Thank you, Mr. President. I want to compliment the distinguished senior Senator from Illinois for what he just said. As he knows, of course, he was the earliest supporter of his then-colleague, then-Senator Barack Obama, and he knows I also supported him very early on.

I was asked why I supported then-Senator Obama, and I said because we have to reintroduce America to the rest of the world. I believe we are a great and wonderful nation. We are the Nation of the Marshall Plan, the Peace Corps, the Nation that brought together a coalition to defeat the fascists and the Nazis and others in World War II. We are a great nation. We discovered polio vaccines. We have done so much. The rest of the world had lost sight of that. There is animosity toward our "it is our way or no way" approach. It is the "we are right you are wrong" attitude of this country and the reference to "Old Europe" and things like this that were so dismissively done. Any of us who traveled around the world realized how that was.

As a proud American, as one who believes we do live in the greatest democracy history has ever known, I wanted to reintroduce America, the America I believe in, to the rest of the world. That is why I supported Barack Obama. That is why I was glad to see President Obama reintroduce us first in Europe and then in Latin America.

The Senator from Illinois is absolutely right. It is all I hear in my State, a State that has a very strong sense of internationalism but a very strong sense of patriotism: Thank goodness somebody is showing what America is.

I commend the President for doing that.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.