

CHINESE WALLBOARD

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I wish to talk about something else that is afflicting this country. A lot of people don't know about this, but we have to get it front and center. One of the exports coming from China into the United States has been drywall. Drywall is the boards that you put up on the studs when you build a house. Normally what it is is a material called gypsum. Gypsum is a byproduct in the mining and manufacturing of phosphate. A lot of that phosphate goes into fertilizer but a byproduct of that is gypsum. And gypsum, put into the form of a flat sheet with thick paper on either side, in boards about 10 feet high and about that wide, is called wallboard. In the modern construction of houses, when you build a house and you divvy up the rooms and you put up these studs to be a wall and you put insulation in there, and then on the outside of the studs you put the wallboard and then you put a finish over the wallboard and you paint that, that is the wall of a house.

The problem is that wallboard that has been imported into this country from China is defective because it has contained some kind of organic compound that is having absolutely disastrous effects in people's houses. When you compare a piece of this wallboard from China with wallboard from America that is gypsum, you can actually see the difference. Gypsum is dry. It is absorbent, which is what you want for a wall if there are contaminants or vapors in a house. But this Chinese wallboard is giving off vapors.

What do we find in our houses? This is not only in Florida, this is all over the southern United States. They have discovered it in Louisiana. They have discovered it in California, in Texas, they have discovered it in Georgia, and some people are now discovering it in the Atlantic coast, the north Atlantic region of the United States. What they are discovering is that, first, you walk into a house with Chinese wallboard and you notice a smell. It is a different smell. It is pungent. Some people call it like a rotten egg smell. As I have gone into these homes over the course of the Easter break back in Florida, to me the smell is not so much rotten eggs but you detect the smell of sulfur, but it starts searing the nasal passages.

I am kind of like a canary in the coal mine because my respiratory system is very sensitive to these kinds of things, for example, mold and mildew. I will get congested if I walk into a home with mold and mildew and I will start coughing. When I walked into those homes a week and a half ago in Florida, the same thing happened to me. I would only be in the home 10 minutes and my nasal passages started to constrict, my voice got scratchy. I started to get what we call getting clogged up. I started hacking and wheezing, my eyes started watering.

Lo and behold, that is happening to these homeowners. This is their home.

This is their life investment. Now, through no fault of their own, they are finding out they have a part of their home that is now irritating their respiratory system and in some cases their family members have had to go to the hospital and in other cases their pediatricians are telling them to get their children out of those houses. The family has vacated the home, their life investment—vacated. Hopefully they have some relatives they can go live with, and in some cases they do not. You can imagine the financial burden.

What else are these homeowners telling me? They are telling me that in the homes, these vapors that are being emitted are suddenly corroding any kind of metallic substance in the home. I went into homes where I looked at the air conditioning unit and the coils on the air conditioner are completely corroded and the homeowners tell me over the course of the last 4 years they have had to change the air conditioner three times because it is not only a corrosion, it is eating through the coils.

I took a screwdriver and I went over to one of the copper pipes on an air conditioner unit and I started scraping it. It was completely soot black. Copper, when it ages, turns green. Not this. I started scraping off that soot black exterior and, sure enough, there was the copper underneath. And the coils that were metallic on the air conditioner, of some other metal, had been corroded through. And here is this homeowner and that homeowner and that one over there who have had to replace the air conditioner three times in the last 5 years. It is unbelievable.

I talked to a husband and wife in one of the homes. In this case I went to homes down near Fort Myers. I went to homes near Bradenton. I went to homes near West Palm Beach. The couple had been on a cruise to Mexico in January. They bought a beautiful silver bracelet. You know that silver will tarnish over time. You have to polish it up. In this case, that silver bracelet had been in the house for 1 month and it was black as soot. These vapors that are coming off whatever this organic material is in the Chinese drywall are making people sick, their houses are uninhabitable, their appliances, including the dishwashers, are corroding, and their life investment in their home is going up in smoke. That is not right.

Needless to say, there is a bunch of lawsuits. But who are they going to sue? They are going to sue a Chinese wallboard manufacturer who is in China. Maybe there is a distributor here. We have a U.S. Government and there is an arm of the U.S. Government called the Consumer Product Safety Commission. This, by the way, is the same Consumer Product Safety Commission that was letting in all of those defective Chinese toys that were killing our children, 2 and 3 and 4 years ago. So last year the Congress, bipartisan, reformed the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The Consumer

Product Safety Commission, in the reform of this legislation, has the authority, No. 1, to stop the import of this Chinese drywall and also exact a recall of this product.

But has the Consumer Product Safety Commission done it? No. To their credit, they sent in an investigation team, and that investigation team reported to the staff of the Senate yesterday. I happened to go and talk to them. So I asked them three questions yesterday. I said: How harmful is this stuff?

And they said: We do not know.

And I said: Well, you are doing an investigation.

Well, it is going to take us a while.

Well, did you see the same effects?

A member of that investigation team concurred with what I have just shared about how it affected his respiratory system, his eyes were watering, he was clogging up, and so forth.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent for an additional 5 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. So as of yesterday, they did not have a conclusion. I would urge them to hurry their conclusion. They ought to be doing this in conjunction with the EPA and the Centers for Disease Control because if this thing is in what we think it is, 100,000 homes in this country—and perhaps half of those are in Florida because that is where a lot of the building was going on in the aftermath of the four hurricanes that hit Florida in 2004—if this is in 100,000 homes, we have a real problem.

You cannot get the home builders. Look, most of them are financially, if not bankrupt, down to their last pennies as it is. There has to be someone financially responsible, and you cannot expect the homeowner to bear this cost. But what about the effects on their health?

Well, as of yesterday, they did not have an answer. So then I asked them: Well, you have done an investigation. How widespread is it?

They said: We do not know.

Well, we better start knowing.

So I said: Well, since you do not know how harmful it is, and you do not know how widespread it is, what are you going to do about helping homeowners?

They said: We do not know.

Well, a number of us, Senator LANDRIEU, Senator VITTER, both of them from Louisiana—because a lot of this drywall came into Louisiana through the Port of New Orleans, they are getting the same kind of complaints from their State that I am getting from the State of Florida.

We can file legislation that will suggest what to do. It is too bad we have to file legislation because the CPSC has the legal authority under the law to ban the import of this wallboard and

to exact a recall and to freeze the assets of the companies that are attributable to that drywall that is manufactured in China. They have that authority.

If they are not going to act on that authority, then the Congress is going to have to act for them. That is the bill Senator LANDRIEU and Senator VITTER and I and others also who have joined have filed.

I thank the Senator from Oklahoma, Mr. INHOFE, our dear friend. I did not even know this, but the Senator must have heard some of this problem in his State of Oklahoma. This is a problem of monumental proportions.

I will close by saying, because of that report yesterday from the staff of the commission to the staff of the Senate committees, there are a couple of news articles today: "Drywall Clamor Is Intensifying." Another headline cries out, "Agency Outlines Strategy To Deal With Chinese Drywall." Another headline cries out, "Efforts On Chinese Drywall Fix Too Slow."

I close with this: Put yourself in the place of the poor homeowner. They are there with their children. This is their dream home. They have put all of their assets into their home. They are current on their mortgage, and suddenly they start realizing the symptoms they and their children have had over the last several months, and in some cases years, is attributable to this. They now understand why they have replaced their air-conditioning unit three times. They now see why they cannot keep their silver polished. They now know why the refrigerator metal and the dishwasher metal is constantly corroding, and their pediatrician is telling them to get their child out of that house. As a result, they have vacated their dream home.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. So I close by saying my plea to the Senate is to insist, if we have to, through the passage of this legislation, to address this problem head on. It is a major problem facing the people of this country.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, it is my understanding that I have 1 hour. I did not mind the Senator going over. I was enjoying the comments of my friend from Florida. But I want to make sure I still have that hour.

I ask unanimous consent that I do.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GUANTANAMO BAY

Mr. INHOFE. Let me say this to my friend from Florida. Coincidentally, I was talking to my friend, Senator VITTER, who went over this with me. I have instructed my staff to add me to the Senator's bill as a cosponsor.

As the Senator from Florida will remember, he and I have agreed on a lot

of the problems we are having today with China; for one thing, the threat that is out there, both in terms of energy and military buildup. I have been very much concerned as I go through—and my friend from Florida and I are both very active in trying to get things done in Africa—as we go through Africa, individually or together, we notice one of the major things we see taking place there, particularly in the area of the Sea of Guinea and other places in Nigeria where they have huge oil reserves, is the Chinese are building all of these new and shiny bridges and all that, which is competing with us since we have the same problem they have in terms of a lack of energy.

So I would enjoy joining him in some of these problems we see that we are having with China.

I wanted some time this morning. I actually have four causes going on right now. I am not going to have time to address all four of these. But I will just briefly say what they are, then I will start with the one I think is the most critical right now. First of all, one of my causes is having to do with Guantanamo Bay.

The fact that people are talking about closing it, President Obama has stated—actually in his inaugural address he did not, but then later on said, yes, we are going to close it in spite of the problems that would come to us if we did close it.

I am anxious to have time on the floor to talk about the frequent visits I have made to GITMO. One of the few good deals the Government has today is Guantanamo Bay. It might be that the Presiding Officer is not aware of the fact. It is one of the good deals out there. We only pay \$4,000 a year, the same thing we paid in 1903, for the use of this great facility.

There has been no evidence of any kind of abuse of prisoners or detainees. They have a judicial center that is unlike anything in the United States. These are tribunals.

We cannot put these terrorists, these detainees, into our prison system. That is not going to work. If it does, I would like to know which Member of the Senate wants to have those detainees housed in their own State. I am sure the Presiding Officer is not excited about having them in Illinois. I am not excited about having them in Oklahoma.

What would happen is, anyplace where they would be detained in the United States would be a magnet to terrorist activity. But I hope I will have a chance to talk about that.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The next thing would be on some of the recent developments in what they used to call the global warming problem. Since we are in the fifth year of a cooling period, they are trying to change that to "climate change." But this is something a lot of people in this body are pursuing.

I would say this: There are not the votes for a major tax increase. A cap and trade on carbon would now constitute somewhere between \$350 and \$400 billion each year as a tax increase,

and it is something that would not accomplish anything.

In fact, if there are a few people still remaining out there who believe global warming is caused by carbon dioxide and we need to restrict it in some way, let's keep in mind, if we do something unilaterally in the United States of America, then what few manufacturing jobs we have left in this country are going to go to places where they can provide energy in places such as China and Mexico, where they have no restrictions on emissions on CO₂.

So I would only say I hope we have time to talk about that.

TARP

The last thing is TARP, the program that started here. I was critical of the Bush administration back in October when then the Secretary of the Treasury came along and talked about, well, we have to have \$700 billion to buy damaged assets. I looked at that thing and read it. There was nothing in there that compelled the Secretary of the Treasury or the President to use that \$700 billion for anything. There is no accountability to Congress. It is unprecedented.

So I was criticizing the Bush administration, only to find out it was Tim Geithner, who is now the Secretary of the Treasury, who was behind this whole thing. He started the Bear Stearns problem. So I no longer criticize the Bush administration and Hank Paulson.

But, nonetheless, if you stop and think, it is so hard for me and for other people to envision what \$1 trillion is or \$100 billion is. The \$700 billion, if you will do your math, you take the number of households who file tax returns and pay taxes and that is \$5,000 per household. That is shocking when you tell people.

A lot of people who voted for that in the first place, in fact, 75 of the Senators who voted for that monstrosity back in October now are regretting that they did. Their comments are, well, they lied to us. They said that was going to be used for damaged assets.

They did lie to us. They flat lied. They never had any intention of using that money to buy damaged assets. Now, after they have bailed out several banks and put billions of dollars in banks, now they are saying, well, we need to buy damaged assets. Well, where were they when the problem was there?

I do want to talk about that and will be talking about that in a lot of detail as time goes by.

MILITARY BUDGET

Last Monday, I did not have much time on the Senate floor to get into the problem that I see, and the problem was with the announcement that was made by Secretary Gates, the Secretary of Defense. It happens by coincidence that I was in Afghanistan when that happened. I was looking around