

change the coverage they have for a government system they do not particularly want. Some of the advocates of a government plan are beginning to sense this growing public opposition to their proposal. But rather than make their case on the merits, they are basing their arguments on the urgency of the moment.

We keep hearing that time is running out, that the clock on reform is about to expire, that the entire health care system and the whole economy will soon collapse without this particular reform. Well, we have been down this road before.

Earlier this year, we heard the same dire warnings about the stimulus. If Congress did not pass the stimulus, we were told, unemployment would continue to rise and the economy would continue to falter. We did not just have to pass it, we had to pass it right away. The results are now coming in: higher unemployment, soaring job losses, higher debt, huge deficits, and growing fears about inflation.

Many of us saw this coming. That is why we proposed an alternative stimulus that would not add a trillion dollars to the debt and would have gotten to the root cause of our economic problem, which is housing. That is why in the debate over health care Republicans are proposing reforms that would make health care more accessible and less expensive without destroying what people like about our health care system and without sending the Nation deeper and deeper into debt.

Every cost estimate we have heard about the administration's plans for health care is astronomical. The administration realizes this is a problem, and yet they have no good plan for covering the cost. Some of the ideas that have been floated are a series of taxes, including a tax on soft drinks. But even that would not come close to covering the cost. So they have been looking frantically for money, and the target they seem to have landed on is Medicare—the government health plan for the elderly.

Last month, the administration proposed hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts. It said by taking this money out of Medicare and putting it into a new government-run plan for all Americans, we could help pay for health care reform. Not only is this aimed at concealing the cost of the new government plan, it is also a reckless misuse of funds that should be used to stabilize Medicare instead.

Weeks before the administration proposed its cuts to Medicare, the government board that oversees this vital program issued an urgent report on its looming insolvency. Let me say that again. Just weeks before the administration recommended Medicare cuts in order to pay for a new program, the government board that oversees this program issued an urgent report on its looming insolvency. Already, Medicare is spending more money than it is tak-

ing in. It runs out of money altogether in 8 years. And over the coming decades, Medicare is already committed to spend nearly \$40 trillion that it does not have.

If there were ever a crisis that cannot wait another day for reform, it is Medicare. Yet rather than do the hard but necessary work to put this program on a sound financial basis, the administration wants to take money away from it and use it to create an entirely new government-run system that would presumably have the same fiscal problems down the road that Medicare has today. This makes no sense whatsoever.

Savings from Medicare should be put back into Medicare—not a government plan that could drive millions of Americans out of the private health care plans they have and like and lead to the same kind of denial, delay, and rationing of health care that we have seen in other countries.

We must be committed to reform but not a so-called reform that raids one insolvent government-run health care program in order to create another insolvent government-run health care program. The administration should be applauded for trying to fix what is wrong with our Nation's health care system, but it needs to slow down and take a deep breath before taking over what amounts to about one-sixth of our Nation's economy with a single piece of legislation that lacks bipartisan support.

The administration rushed ahead with a poorly conceived stimulus plan that added a trillion dollars to the national debt and has not stopped half a million Americans a month from losing their jobs. It should learn from that and not rush a poorly conceived health care plan with money we do not have. We do not need more rush-and-spend policymaking. We need to reform health care, but we do not need to weaken Medicare to do it. We can reform both, but we should start with Medicare.

At a time when Americans are increasingly concerned about the future of health care and also about a political system in which they see fewer and fewer checks on the party in power, now would be the ideal time to advance a truly bipartisan reform. The President has repeatedly expressed openness to reforming Medicare in the past. We stand ready to work with him to strengthen and preserve Medicare if he chooses to follow through on those assurances.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I congratulate the Republican leader on his remarks. I remember Senator McCONNELL's first address following President Obama's election at the National Press Club. It was to the President, saying: Mr. President, we look forward to working with you, and the pressing issue is the entitlements fac-

ing this country, the automatic spending that means more and more and more debt.

I would ask the Republican leader whether there has been any response from the administration to him about the opportunity to work together across party lines to deal with Social Security which, as I remember in January, was your proposal?

Mr. McCONNELL. I say to my good friend from Tennessee, unfortunately, there has been no followup whatsoever. There seemed to be, on the part of the President and the President's Chief of Staff at the beginning of the administration, a willingness to support the Conrad-Gregg proposal, which would have given us a way to get a handle on at least Social Security—they did not seem to want to deal with Medicare, and I think we now know why—at least Social Security, with an expedited procedure and an up-or-down vote guaranteeing a result. But I would say to my friend from Tennessee, there has been no word on that lately.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, in my visits in Tennessee this past week, if I heard two things, one was too many Washington takeovers; the other was too much debt. I found in people—and I hesitate to use the word—a great deal of fear about the amount of debt we are piling up here in Washington.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I think there is a genuine alarm. Americans see the government now running banks, insurance companies, automobile companies. The Senator from Tennessee points out student loans. Now they fear the government wants to take over health care as well. I think there is a growing suspicion that this is exactly the wrong way to go.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I thank the Senator for his comment about checks and balances. There is something innate in the American character about checks and balances. Alexis de Tocqueville warned, in the early 1800s, about the tyranny of a majority. We like to see results, but we do not want to see one party or one faction run away with policy. We seem to know it is better if there is a check and a balance. And the genius of the American system is we have many checks and balances.

I wonder, Mr. President, how much time do I have remaining?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator has 8 minutes remaining.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I thank the Acting President pro tempore.

NUCLEAR POWER

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, health care is not the only issue before the Senate. We have the nomination by the President of a distinguished jurist, Judge Sotomayor. Hearings will begin next week on whether she should be confirmed for the Supreme Court.

Tomorrow, the Senate, in the Environment and Public Works Committee,

begins discussion on climate change and global warming—a subject we have talked about a lot. The House of Representatives has made that an issue by passing, about 10 days ago, another one of these bills that by all reports no one in the House of Representatives read before it was passed—1,200 pages served up the day before they voted. They voted and sent it on over to us. So we have energy and climate change to deal with, which is the subject of my remarks this afternoon.

My question is this: Why is Congress and, to a great extent, the administration ignoring the cheap energy solution to global warming—nuclear power?

Consider this: No. 1, coal-burning powerplants produce about 40 percent of carbon, and carbon is the principal greenhouse gas causing global warming. That is the first fact.

Second, nuclear powerplants, which produce only 20 percent of all of our electricity in America, produce 70 percent of our carbon-free, pollution-free electricity.

So coal-burning powerplants produce 40 percent of the carbon, and nuclear powerplants produce 70 percent of the carbon-free electricity, and our goal is to get rid of the carbon to slow down global warming. I think that is the goal anyway.

So if that is the goal, if global warming is your issue, why not build 100 new nuclear powerplants during the next 20 years to deal with it? Nuclear power costs less than one-half cent per kilowatt hour to produce, which means it is cheap enough to pay for building the plants and will still leave electric rates low.

The rest of the world seems to understand this a little better than we do in the United States today. France gets 80 percent of its electricity from nuclear and has among the lowest carbon emission rates and electricity prices in the European Union. The United States—our taxpayers—is helping India and China build nuclear plants. Japan is building one nuclear plant a year. The President has even said that Iran has the right to build nuclear powerplants. But the United States has not built one new nuclear plant in 30 years, even though we invented the technology.

So instead, the House of Representatives, 10 days ago, chose the high-cost solution to the climate change energy dilemma, narrowly passing an economywide so-called cap-and-trade bill, the Waxman-Markey bill. This is a job-killing \$100 billion a year new national energy tax, which would add a new utility bill to the budget of every American family.

The House also mandated the use of solar and wind power, which is 6 percent of our carbon-free electricity. Remember, nuclear is 70 percent of our carbon-free electricity. So the House, ignoring nuclear, says: Let's expand solar and wind, which is 6 percent of our carbon-free electricity, even though both are more expensive and more unreliable since solar and wind

power cannot be stored today, which means you have to use it when the Sun shines and the wind blows. Wind, especially, barely works in some parts of the country, such as the Southeast.

So the choice is between a high-priced or a low-priced clean energy strategy. I think we all want a clean energy future, but do we want a deliberately high-priced clean energy future or a low-priced one? High pricers want taxes and mandates. Cheap energy advocates—almost all Republicans in Congress and some Democrats, and I hope a growing number—say build nuclear plants and double research to make renewable energy cheaper and reliable. High-priced energy sends American jobs overseas looking for cheap energy. I see that in all of the auto plants we have in Tennessee, and the auto suppliers. They are operating on a very thin margin. Add a little cost and those cars and trucks are built in Mexico and Japan instead of Tennessee and Michigan.

Cheap energy not only creates jobs, it will reduce global warming faster than taxes and mandates. Here is why: 100 new plants in 20 years would double U.S. nuclear production, making it more than 40 percent of all electricity production. Add 10 percent or so for Sun and wind and biomass, another 10 percent for hydroelectric, and we begin to have a cheap as well as a clean energy policy.

Some predict renewable sources will be 20 percent of electricity in 20 years. I predict it will be about half that, after Americans understand its costs and its lack of reliability and they begin to see what some conservationists are calling the “renewable energy sprawl”—50-story wind turbines along the foothills of the Great Smokey Mountain National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Shenandoah Valley and solar thermal plants 5 miles wide next to national parks, all with big new transmission lines. Plus, since the Sun shines and the wind blows only about one-third of the time—remember, you can't store it—we will still need nuclear plants for base load power.

Step 2 for a clean and cheap energy policy is to electrify half our cars and trucks. There is so much unused electricity at night, we can also do this in 20 years without building one new powerplant if we plug in vehicles while we sleep. This is the fastest way to reduce dependence on foreign oil, keep fuel prices low, and reduce the one-third of carbon that comes from gasoline engines.

Step 3 is offshore exploration for natural gas—that is low carbon—and oil. We should use less but use more of our own.

Finally, we should double energy research and development to make renewable energy such as solar more cost competitive.

Obstacles to nuclear power are diminishing. Used fuel can be stored safely onsite for 40 to 60 years while sci-

entists figure out the best way to reduce its mass and recycle or reuse it. New plants can be one-tenth the size and one-tenth the cost of the big ones we are accustomed to today and can be put together at an American factory and shipped to the site and assembled like Lego blocks—all of this American made—and with air cooling towers, not water cooling, and the towers are only two stories tall.

I have introduced legislation to deal with global warming ever since I came to the Senate, but I am not in favor of economy-wide cap and trade. It is unnecessary. It is complex. It has unintended consequences. Our economy can't tolerate it. A simpler way to do it would be to focus on smokestacks, tailpipes, and find alternative ways to deal with the coal and the oil we want to use less of. We have that with tailpipes, cars, and trucks. We can shift to electric cars and trucks and the cost to the consumer will be as low or lower as they plug in at night to electricity. We also have that with smokestacks. We can shift some of our dirtiest coal plants to nuclear power, and instead of increasing the cost of energy, we could keep it steady or probably reduce it. So why would we want to deliberately proceed with a high-cost energy strategy when cheap energy is the key to our national security, to rebuilding our economy, and the key to so much of what is important to America's future?

There is an old rule of thumb that sometimes in government we take a good idea and expand it until it doesn't work. I am afraid we are doing that with renewable energy—which is a good idea—the idea of putting up your own windmill in your backyard, put some solar panels on your roof, use biomass, and cut your energy costs and cut your use of fossil fuels. That is a good idea, but it is only going to produce a small percentage of what we actually need to run a country such as this which uses 25 percent of all of the energy in the world.

Biomass, for example, to produce the amount of energy that one nuclear powerplant produces, you would have to forest continuously an area the size of the entire Great Smokey Mountain National Park, which is 550,000 acres. To produce enough electricity to equal a nuclear powerplant from solar power you would have to cover an area about the size of 270 square miles, and that is 5 or 6 miles on each side. The same with wind, or the same with hydroelectric, and we are not going to be building any big, new reservoirs anymore of that size.

So we should take what we can get in appropriate places of wind and solar and biomass. We should put a few turbines in the Mississippi River and pick up some megawatts for the TBA, for example, but that is a few hundred megawatts for a system that needs to produce 27,000 megawatts of reliable, low-cost, clean electricity every year.

The only technology we have available to produce large amounts of clean,

reliable electricity in the next 20 years is nuclear power. We invented it. We know how to use it. The rest of the world is taking advantage of it. Why don't we? Especially in this economy, when we have nearly 10 percent unemployment, when in Tennessee and Virginia and in the Midwest we are trying to find ways to rebuild the economy, when we know that cheap energy is the key to new jobs and that high-priced energy drives jobs overseas looking for cheap energy, why are we ignoring the cheap energy strategy for dealing with global warming, cheap energy based on nuclear power, No. 1; electric cars and trucks, No. 2; offshore drilling for natural gas and oil which we are still going to need, and pushing ahead with mini Manhattan projects in energy research and development to figure out renewable energy and help make it cost competitive while we move ahead?

This is not only the fastest way to increase American energy independence, clean the air, and reduce global warming, it is the best way to help strained family budgets and a sick economy with 10 percent unemployment.

I thank the President, I yield the floor, and I note the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2010

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Mr. President, I ask for the clerk to report the bill.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 2918, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2918) making appropriations for the Legislative Branch for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2010, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Nelson (NE) amendment No. 1365, in the nature of a substitute.

McCain amendment No. 1366 (to amendment No. 1365), to strike the earmark for the Durham Museum in Omaha, NE.

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Mr. President, we are returning to the Legislative Branch Committee bill for further consideration today. It is my understanding that my colleague from Oklahoma has an amendment he would like to offer. He was here. Perhaps he will rejoin us shortly.

To recap, this is the legislative branch bill, which has a number of different important issues in it, not the least of which is the fact that when you compare the percentage of increase this year with previous years, it is an effective 2.4-percent increase. We controlled the growing costs associated with the new Visitor Center, which were significant in the last budget.

Let me, at this point, yield to the Senator from Oklahoma.

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

AMENDMENT NO. 1369 TO AMENDMENT NO. 1365

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I wish to spend a few minutes talking about the legislative branch and us and where we find ourselves. I do have an amendment and I appreciate the consideration of it.

Right now, the average income in this country is down four-tenths of 1 percent this year. Historically, people wonder why Congress cannot control spending. They cannot control spending because they cannot even control their own budget. We are going to see about a 3.2-percent increase in the bill. The House is coming in at 6.1. In conference, we will decide what the legislative branch increase in expenses is on the American public. The reason that spending is out of control and the reason we are shackling our grandchildren with an enormous amount of debt—another \$5 trillion in the next 5 years—is because we don't even do a good job managing our own office budgets.

I am on the floor a lot complaining about wasteful spending, earmarks, and other issues. I don't do that without setting the proper example in my own office. I have been here 4 complete years. I am in my fifth year. During that time, I have turned back, in 2005, \$321,000; in 2006, \$529,000; in 2007, \$516,000; and in 2008, \$491,000—about 16 to 17 percent of my budget.

If I can do that, the question the American people ought to ask is: Why can't everybody up here do that? Why can't we manage our own legislative branch expenses? With the economic environment in which we find ourselves today, the American people ought to be asking what are our elected leaders doing to cut their expenses because we are borrowing a good portion of this money. Why are we not setting an example? If we don't do it, then we are certainly not going to have the various Federal agencies do it.

If you look at spending increases, outside the omnibus and the Recovery Act, Congress increased spending almost 7.2 percent last year. The budget has in it 7.3 percent. That is three times the rate of income growth prior to this recession. Yet we are growing the government three, four times faster, and we are growing our own budgets two and a half or three times faster. This time, it will be five or six times faster than Americans' income is growing.

The question has to be asked: If we are not good stewards with our own of-

fices, how can we be good stewards with the money entrusted to us?

Mr. President, I call up amendment No. 1369 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Oklahoma [Mr. COBURN] proposes an amendment numbered 1369 to amendment No. 1365.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President I ask unanimous consent that reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To require expenditures by every Senate office be posted online for the public to review)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

SEC. _____. REPORTING REQUIREMENT.

Section 105(a) of the Legislative Branch Appropriations Act 1965 (Public Law 88-454; 2 U.S.C. 104a) is amended—

(1) in the last sentence of paragraph (1), by striking “shall” and inserting “may”; and

(2) by adding at the end the following:

“(6) Beginning with the report covering the first full semiannual period of the 112th Congress, the Secretary of the Senate—

“(1) shall publicly post on-line on the website of the Senate each report in a searchable, itemized format as required under this section;

“(2) shall issue each report required under this section in electronic form; and

“(3) may issue each report required under this section in other forms at the discretion of the Secretary of the Senate.”

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, this is a very simple amendment. It says we will take the money we spend and make available online to the American people how we spent it. Right now, there are a limited number of books published. We transfer it from computers to a book, but we don't give it to the American people so they can see how we are spending money on our office accounts. Senators NELSON of Nebraska and REID have graciously said they support this amendment. We will have limited debate.

The one way to get this spending under control in our individual offices, as well as in the Federal Government, is to make available to the American people how we spend it. So my hope is this will be a short period of time, and at the end of this year, the American people can go on a Web site and see how TOM COBURN spent his money, in terms of running the office of the junior Senator from Oklahoma. I think they will find I am as frugal with their money in my office as I am trying to be frugal on the floor when it comes to wasteful spending. There is \$350 billion worth of waste that will go through this year, without one stroke of it being eliminated—\$350 billion worth of waste and not one legitimate stroke will be eliminated as we go through the Appropriations Committees and the President's budget—and he is trying to eliminate some. But we won't even do a line-by-line review.