

in its higher education part of its division simply a mechanism for sending money out—Pell grants, paying bills—how it is going to make 19 million new loans a year.

In my State of Tennessee, the non-profit provider of student loans, one of the 2,000 lenders that exist in the country to serve students in New Hampshire or everywhere—these are some of the things they do. They have five regional outreach counselors to canvass Tennessee to provide college and career planning; they made 443 presentations through college fairs; they worked 12,000 students to improve their understanding of college admissions and financial aid; they provided training to over 1,000 school counselors so they could work with students; they sent out 1.5 million financial aid brochures for Tennessee students. I cannot imagine the Department of Education having the capacity to do that.

I think the Senator is right. I think we are going to see long lines of very upset students, starting in January—because that is when they start filling out those forms—saying: What has happened here? I have to line up at the U.S. Department of Education to get my student loan, 19 million of us?

Mr. GREGG. I think the Senator from Tennessee has hit one of the core issues here, independent of the fact that this is just a scam to create more room to spend more money to spend on other programs, and it is scamming the students by hitting them with \$47 billion of interest payments which they should not have to pay if this is followed. But the Senator has raised another valuable question here, which is obviously students were reasonably comfortable with the system the way it worked because 75 percent of the students had opted to pursue the private sector loan process. Granted it was a little more expensive for them—not dramatically by student; obviously cumulatively it was, but not dramatically by student. But I think they took that option because it was so much more convenient.

In our society, which is reasonably capitalistic—but becoming less so under this administration; obviously we are moving down the road toward a Socialist state—but independent of that, people often pay a little more for the convenience of it, for the convenience of having an efficiently delivered loan, for the convenience of knowing whom to talk to when you have a problem, for the convenience of basically being able to go get answers quickly to your questions. Essentially, that is what these higher education authorities created in every State. Tennessee has one. New Hampshire has one. They are really good people. They are, for the most part, except for their executive director, volunteers. Their purpose is to make sure students have very prompt access to student loans which are significant enough for them to pay for their education and that it is also done in a way that is convenient so

they do not have to end up just getting lost in a massive bureaucracy. I suspect every congressional office is going to have to become a massive clearinghouse for student loan problems. We don't have that now. We have problems with a lot of programs and agencies, but student loans is not one of them.

It really is a big issue of the marketplace having voted with their feet, so to say. The students in this country voted to use the guaranteed loan system, pay a little bit more for the purposes of the convenience they were being given by having that sort of easy access and substantive information right at hand, versus going to the government and getting overwhelmed by a government bureaucracy which is often indifferent to consumer issues and is difficult to deal with.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I appreciate the comments of the Senator.

In President Obama's address to us on health care the other day, he said:

My guiding principle is and always has been, the consumers do better when there is choice and competition. That is how the market works.

I guess he means except when we are talking about student loans.

Twenty years ago, we set up a system to give people a choice, and, as you said, they voted with their feet. This past year, 14 million students made a choice to be under the regular student loan program. They are at 4,000 campuses, went to 2,000 lenders, they got a lot of extra services, I assume, or they could have come to the Department of Education, which about 4.5 million students chose to do. The Senator has made it clear that the excuse for doing—but, well, let me say this.

I guess the Senator has heard many times the President and people on the other side of the aisle say: Well, we inherited this problem. The reason we own General Motors, or 60 percent of it, is because we inherited it from President Bush. Or: The reason we are dealing with the American International Group Insurance Company is because we inherited that problem. Or: The reason we had to take over the banks is we inherited that problem.

Well, this is a completely voluntary Washington takeover, if I am not mistaken.

Mr. GREGG. The Senator is once again correct. There is a macro issue of economics here. Although it is tangential to the Senator's primary concern, which is the very legitimate concern of: Why are we taking all of this money from students if we are going to do this type of program? And why are we spending all of this money even before we take it in? And why are we putting students through having to stand in line like at the DMV to get a loan?

There is a macro issue here, which is for the government to take over all of this debt means we are going to add \$500 billion to \$600 billion to the government ledger. We are now nowhere near that in the student loan area because we are not primarily responsible for the debt.

As a result, you are going to have some significant crowding out. It could easily aggravate our ability to borrow money for the purposes of financing these massive deficits the President wants to run, the trillion-dollar deficits every year for the next 10 years that are in the budget.

I do not think it will be a massive issue, but it will be a significant issue. It could affect the rate of interest which we have to pay as a government. It could affect other nations looking at us and saying: Do we have too much debt on our books?

Most of this debt will go into a revolving fund, and hopefully it will be repaid, as it is traditionally. But the initial debt will still have to be put on the books at some point.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Well, I thank the Senator. I think what we have seen is getting to be too familiar around here, an action by the administration, another Washington takeover, more debt, to the tune of \$500 billion or \$600 billion, more debt. You said on the \$87 billion or \$47 billion spending of money we do not really have.

Mr. GREGG. Well, the \$87 billion is what has been spent. That is what they are going to spend.

Mr. ALEXANDER. They are going to spend the \$87 billion. As you have eloquently said: There is no \$87 billion. That adds to the debt.

Then there is the problem of 19 million students lining up at the Department of Education to get their student loans starting in January. Perhaps we need a piece of truth-in-lending legislation that would go on every student loan application that says: Congratulations. Your government is making you a student loan. We borrowed it at one-quarter of 1 percent, and we are going to loan it to you at 6.8 percent, and we are going to spend twice that much on new programs that we thought of while we take over the entire student loan program.

Mr. GREGG. I would say the Senator from Tennessee has hit on a very appropriate disclosure issue that should be on every one of those loans.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Unless the Senator from New Hampshire has further comments, I yield the floor.

Mr. GREGG. I appreciate the courtesy of the Senator from Tennessee.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. How much time is remaining?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. There is 9½ minutes.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Please let me know when 1 minute remains.

NUCLEAR POWER

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, today President Obama told the countries of the world that the United States is ready to lead on climate change. But while he is reassuring world leaders, he has a lot of work to do with us in the Senate.

Only yesterday in *The Wall Street Journal*, John Bruton, the European Ambassador to the United States, chided the Senate, saying:

Is the U.S. Senate really expecting all the other countries to make a serious effort on climate change at the Copenhagen Conference in the absence of a clear commitment from the United States? Asking an international Conference to sit around looking out the window for months, while one chamber of the legislature of one country deals with its other business, is simply not a realistic political position.

Now I understand the Ambassador's frustration, but I hope he understands that the Senate has work to do other than deal with climate change and energy. Reforming health care involving one-sixth of our Nation's economy is not something the Senate is going to do in a hurry.

On the matter of climate change, however, he is asking a legitimate question. An even better question might be this: "How can the United States lecture other countries about climate change when we won't take advantage of the one technology that shows the most promise of dealing with it?" I am talking, of course, about nuclear power, which produces 19 percent of all our electricity but 70 percent of our carbon-free electricity.

Coal-fired powerplants produce 36 percent of the carbon dioxide; the principal greenhouse gas that most scientists believe contributes to global warming. Of the top five countries that produce carbon, indeed that produce most of the carbon in the world, four, China, Russia, India and Japan, are committed to a bold program of expansion of nuclear power.

Only the United States is not. We are the country that invented nuclear power, and we have not started a new nuclear plant in 30 years even though the 104 reactors we built during the 1970s which produce 19 percent of all our electricity, and produce 70 percent of our carbon-free electricity.

So, if climate change is the inconvenient problem, as my fellow Tennessean Al Gore says, the other large carbon-emitting nations are posing a legitimate and truly inconvenient question: If we, they may say, are building dozens of carbon-free nuclear powerplants in an effort to deal with climate change, why are you lecturing us when you have not started a new plant in 30 years and your President and everyone in his administration seems to become tongue-tied or get a stomach ache whenever someone mentions the idea of nuclear power.

Everyone, that is, except the one member of the administration who knows the most about nuclear power, Dr. Steven Chu, the Nobel Prize winning scientist who heads the Energy Department. We have heard many say that the Bush administration did a poor job of listening to scientists. Well, then, perhaps it is fair for me to suggest that the Obama administration, including the President, might do more listening to their chief scientist, Dr. Chu.

In testimony before Congress, Dr. Chu has flatly said that nuclear powerplants are safe.

He has said that the used nuclear fuel from those plants, the nuclear waste, can be safely stored on site for 40–60 years while scientists engage in a mini-Manhattan Project like the one we had in World War II to find the best possible way to recycle used nuclear fuel. Most likely that will mean that the waste's mass is reduced by 97 percent and it will only be radioactive for 300 years instead of 1 million, or that it will be continuously used over and over again so there is none of the plutonium that might be used to make bombs.

In an interview on National Public Radio the other day, Dr. Chu said that he would rather live down the river from a nuclear plant than other forms of producing energy. "There's less pollution we know about that's very dangerous. The nuclear power plants' record in the United States is really very, very good," he said.

Our whole fleet of 104 reactors is up and running 90 percent of the time, which shows we know how to operate nuclear powerplants better and more safely than any other country. Even France does not run its reactors as well and they have got plenty of experience, they get 80 percent of their electricity from nuclear power.

But if we have learned to run reactors in this country, we still cannot bring ourselves to build any new ones. We have been stuck at about 100 reactors for 20 years now. We built those 100 reactors from 1970 to 1990 at a time when we had never built any before yet now that we have got all that under our belt we cannot seem to get started on the new generation.

But while we have not been able to start a new plant in 30 years, the rest of the world is taking the technology we invented and using it to create cheap, reliable, carbon-free electricity from nuclear plants. There are 44 reactors under construction right this minute, most of them in Asia. Asia? Yes, without most Americans realizing it, the center of gravity of nuclear innovation has moved to the Far East. China has four reactors under construction and has announced plans for 130 more. Russia intends to build two reactors a year in order to replace the 30 percent of their electricity they get from natural gas so they can sell the gas to Europe at six times the price they get at home. Japan already gets 36 percent of its electricity from nuclear, almost twice what we get, and is building two more reactors. South Korea gets nearly 40 percent of its electricity from nuclear and is planning eight more reactors by 2015. They have even got their own design now, a 1400-megawatt next generation reactor that evolved out of something they borrowed from us. India is developing thorium reactors instead of uranium and has a design for a mini-reactor that they are going to market to developed countries.

Just look down the list of the ten top carbon-emitting countries as listed in yesterday's *Wall Street Journal*. I have already mentioned that of the top five, China, the U.S., Russia, India and Japan, we are the only one that does not have an active nuclear construction program. Of the next four, Germany, Canada, the U.K., and South Korea, only Germany claims they do not want nuclear, but they are buying significant amounts of nuclear electricity from France.

Then there is the number 10 carbon emitter, Iran. Now that is an interesting case. A few months ago, President Obama said it was OK for Iran to develop a civilian nuclear power program, he did not have any problem with that. But if it is alright for Iran to have a nuclear power program, why cannot we do the same thing over here?

Leading on climate change does not require passing a complicated cap-and-trade regime with renewable energy mandates that will impose a huge new tax on energy, stifle economic growth, and leave us with intermittent and unreliable alternative energy sources such as wind and solar. That is the wrong direction.

It is time to lead by example and not just words. It is time to embrace the one technology that truly has the possibility of powering a prosperous planet without ruining the environment or covering our treasured landscapes with energy sprawl. It is time to build 100 new nuclear plants in the next 20 years.

And the bonus is we will get plenty of so-called green jobs out of it, twice as many as building the 186,000 wind turbines that it would take to create an amount of electricity equal to 100 new nuclear plants. Building 100 new reactors is going to mean rebuilding a forgotten American infrastructure. We are going to have to build steel forges that can turn out these 600-ton reactor vessels, which is something we cannot do in this country right now. The Japanese and the Chinese and the Russians are all working on it, but we are not. We are going to need scientists, we are going to need construction workers, and we are going to need a whole new generation of nuclear engineers and technicians to replace the last generation that is getting ready to retire.

I ask unanimous consent for 1 additional minute.

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

But the prize we are going to get for it is stable, reliable, low-cost, as well as carbon-free electricity, that will once again allow us to manufacture things in this country again instead of shipping all those jobs overseas looking for cheap energy. We can put America back to work building a whole new infrastructure based on the greatest scientific discovery of the 20th century.

Then when our President visits the United Nations or Copenhagen, he might be able to lead on climate change and he might not receive so

many lectures from other countries that are busy building nuclear powerplants because they understand that if climate change is the inconvenient problem, nuclear power is the inconvenient but best and most environmentally beneficial solution.

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

Mr. CARDIN. I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes, followed by Senator DURBIN.

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

WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. CARDIN. I am happy that when morning business comes to an end we will resume consideration of the fiscal year 2010 Interior Appropriations bill.

I have come to the floor today to support the significant increase in funding for water infrastructure included in that legislation. We in Maryland have witnessed one more dramatic reminder that the water infrastructure of this country is in dire straits and in desperate need of new attention and greater investment.

This past Friday afternoon, water surged for hours from a broken 6-foot-wide water main in Dundalk, MD. The raging water covered streets, pouring water into basements of many homes in Baltimore County, causing significant property damage. The raging water washed out main roads in the area causing significant damage to the infrastructure of the community. Here we see the road being washed out by the water that flowed through this community.

This past Friday I was in Dundalk for the groundbreaking of a new housing development. This is a proud, historic community in Baltimore County. It was devastating, the damage that was done to this community as a result of infrastructure that failed. I would like to say this is an isolated episode but, unfortunately, this is not the first time in the past year we have witnessed instances such as this. Last December, a water main broke sending a 4-foot wall of water down a busy commuter road in Bethesda, MD, just outside of Washington. Here we see the headlines from the paper. Rescue workers were trying to rescue stranded drivers. This was River Road that turned into a river as a result of another water main break in Maryland. The water flowed with such force that Maryland State emergency workers had to rescue some drivers by boat and even by helicopter. Here we see a dramatic rescue. Fortunately, no one was injured, but we could have seen the loss of life.

We need to deal with infrastructure, the pipes of our Nation. While these incidents were perhaps some of the most dramatic, there have been hundreds of water main breaks, large and small, across Maryland over the last year

alone, and we are likely to see more instances such as this in the future. According to the EPA's 2004 clean watershed needs survey, Maryland has nearly \$6 billion in wastewater infrastructure needs alone. But Maryland is not unique in facing a crisis when it comes to water infrastructure. These episodes have been repeated throughout the Nation. Our water infrastructure is reaching a tipping point in many places, having long outlived its 50-year lifespan. The American Society of Civil Engineers rated both wastewater and drinking water systems a D minus, the lowest rating of any infrastructure category.

These problems are compounded by a growing population and more frequent cycles of floods and droughts affecting communities. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates an additional \$6 billion per year will be needed to meet the Nation's wastewater infrastructure needs, and \$5 billion will be needed for drinking water needs.

This is a matter of protecting the safety of people. This is an issue of preventing property damage. Many don't have insurance to cover it because they didn't think they lived in a flood-prone area. They didn't expect a water main to cause a flood in their homes. We need it to save water. We are wasting a lot of water. We need it to save energy because we transport water in an inefficient energy way.

The Interior appropriations bill, which we will be considering today, makes a significant investment in our Nation's water infrastructure. It contains \$2.1 billion for improvements to wastewater infrastructure through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund. This amounts to \$1.4 billion more than Congress appropriated in the last fiscal year. The bill also contains almost \$1.4 billion for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund. This is almost \$600 million more than Congress appropriated last year. These funding levels come on top of \$6 billion for water infrastructure that is going to States as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Much of this new commitment is thanks to a new administration that has recognized the infrastructure crisis and is doing something about it. That commitment is echoed by my colleagues, Senators Feinstein and Alexander, who have included investments in the bill we are considering today. I thank them for their commitment, but new investment alone is not enough. That is why I have introduced, along with Senators Boxer, Inhofe, and Crapo, S. 1005, the Water Infrastructure Financing Act of 2009. This is a bipartisan effort, as it should be, to improve America's infrastructure.

The Water Infrastructure Financing Act of 2009 truly represents a watershed moment in the legislative history of the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act. First and foremost, the bill makes it possible for us to continue considerable investment in

the Nation's aging infrastructure by significantly increasing authorizations for clean water and drinking water. The bill provides \$20 billion for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and nearly \$15 billion for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund over the next 5 years.

The bill goes further to develop new tools to address some of our pressing and growing water infrastructure needs. It allows new and important types of projects to qualify for funding, including efforts to secure wastewater and drinking water facilities and green infrastructure that is often more effective and less expensive than traditional infrastructure. The bill provides additional flexibility in the Clean Water State Revolving Fund to help poor communities by providing loan forgiveness and improving financing, an ability that is especially important as budget cuts make critical infrastructure investment beyond the reach of many communities.

The legislation creates nearly \$2 billion in grant programs to make infrastructure upgrades that will reduce the number of combined and sanitary sewer overflows. These overflows are estimated to contribute 850 billion gallons of untreated sewage and storm water to the Nation's waterways every year. There is a new \$60-million-per-year nationwide grant program to provide funding to States and municipalities to reduce lead in drinking water to protect our children. The bill also contains a new \$50 billion nationwide grant program to address water quality issues associated with agriculture. The bill gives new incentives for water utilities to plan for the future so we don't face another crisis of failing infrastructure 20, 50, or 75 years down the road.

This legislation has the support of broad constituencies: utility construction contractors, engineers and manufacturers, labor organizations, environmental groups, the clean water agencies, regulators, academics, and local government.

The bill was reported out of the Environment and Public Works Committee by a voice vote, a strong bipartisan vote. Americans have the right to clean water flowing through their streams, rivers, and bays. We have the right to drinking water that is healthy.

While I proudly support H.R. 2996, the Department of Interior Appropriations Act of 2010, I hope the full Senate will have the opportunity to vote on the Water Infrastructure Financing Act of 2009 this year. If so, we will be keeping faith with the American people by providing the tools necessary to meet their basic human health and environmental needs. We will help provide water systems that can keep water running through the pipes rather than down the streets, as we saw in Dundalk this past weekend.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I commend the Senator from Maryland. The