

produce a waste that's both smaller in volume and with a shorter radioactive life. Regardless of what technology we ultimately choose, the amount of material will be astonishingly small. And it's because of the amazing density of nuclear technology—something we can't even approach with any other form of energy.

So to answer the question, "Is Nuclear Green?" I believe the answer is "Yes." When you compare it with all the problems we face in discovering and mining and burning fossil fuels, when you think of the thousands of square miles of American landscape we're going to have to cover with windmills or solar collectors to get appreciable amounts of energy—when you compare that to the one square mile taken up by a nuclear reactor and comparatively small amount of spent fuel—well, I don't think there's any question about which technology is going to have the least impact on the environment.

And as a group of geophysicists and earth scientists, I know that you appreciate the fact that nothing can be more natural than harnessing the heat of the earth. As we know, energy cannot be created; it is transformed. Potential energy becomes kinetic energy and then the cycle starts over. Nearly all the energy on the earth comes from the sun. Plants and trees are stored solar energy. The energy to sustain animal and human life comes from plants and other animals. Fossil fuels are organic matter that was buried millions of years ago. Wind and hydropower are energy flows set in motion by the sun's heat. Capturing sunlight on your rooftop is the most direct way of tapping solar energy and converting it into electricity.

There is one form of energy, however, that has little to do with the sun. Deep within the earth the temperature rises to as much as 7,000 degrees Celsius. Much of that heat comes from the breakdown of two elements—Uranium and Thorium. We can tap into the earth's natural heat by using the steam that rises naturally out of the earth at geysers and fumaroles to create electricity. Dig deep enough anywhere on earth and you will encounter geothermal energy.

When we generate power with a nuclear reactor, we just replicate this naturally occurring process that already goes on deep within the earth. We just do it in an accelerated, controlled way and harness the heat that is produced for our own use. We gather through mining naturally occurring uranium, purify and concentrate and maybe enrich it, and then arrange it in such a way as to greatly speed up a process that would have happened anyway—which is the fissioning of Uranium 235. We can then use the heat to boil water and produce electricity.

But even this accelerated reaction is not entirely unique to our engineered nuclear reactors. Two billion years ago, in the country of Gabon in uranium deposits in the Oklo region, a lucky combination of hydrology and bacteria converted some natural uranium deposits into a nuclear reactor that ran for what was probably hundreds of thousands of years. Scientific American reported a few years ago that these natural reactors probably released, over a period of thousands of years, the same energy that the Watts Bar reactor produces in a decade—which is to say a huge amount of power. It's interesting to note that two billion years after those reactors shut off, the world is still here and life still evolved, even though the waste from those reactors wasn't contained and Greenpeace wasn't there to picket.

So nuclear power is as natural as sunlight. It comes from the same source that heats the earth's core. It is a lot more efficient than converting sunlight into electricity or the process of converting sunlight into energy for plant life. The beauty of nuclear

power is that we are able to increase the efficiency of this energy source in our reactors and ultimately create electricity that produces very little waste.

I believe nuclear is green. I believe it is natural. I believe it's the best thing that could have happened to the environment to provide the low-cost, reliable, green energy that America needs for the 21st Century.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. UDALL of New Mexico). The Senator from Nebraska.

EXTENDER ALTERNATIVE

Mr. JOHANNIS. Mr. President, I rise today in support of an alternative approach to the extenders legislation. The Thune amendment is a very simple, if not a novel idea in Washington these days. The novel idea is that it would actually pay for the spending proposed in the bill—all of it. Furthermore, it doesn't raise harmful taxes on the job creators of this country to pay for temporary tax relief. It does not raise taxes temporarily, nor does it raise taxes permanently, as the underlying bill proposes to do.

To illustrate the difference between the Thune amendment and the Baucus substitute, I will share a USA TODAY editorial from May 25, 2010. I am quoting:

Now it's time to start making choices about what's vital, and for those programs that are paying the bills instead of borrowing.

I could not agree more with that editorial.

The alternative is a good first step on the road to fiscal responsibility. We all noted recently that our national debt has reached \$13 trillion, and as alarming as that milestone is, we are actually on pace to double that by 2020. For 2010 alone, the United States is expected to run an annual deficit of \$1.6 trillion—1 year. Next year isn't much better with a projected deficit of \$1.3 trillion. Total U.S. Government debt is near 100 percent of gross domestic product. Let me say that again. Our debt is near 100 percent of our entire gross domestic product. According to the Congressional Budget Office, net interest on publicly held debt would more than quadruple between 2010 and 2020, rising from \$209 billion in 2010 to \$916 billion in 2020. These are sobering figures. We should be under no illusions that the road to fiscal responsibility will be anything but a hard job, but we have to start somewhere. It just isn't acceptable to kick the can down the road and continue to deem all of our spending as an emergency.

As the USA TODAY editorial noted:

None of these needs suddenly popped up yesterday. The dictionary defines emergency as: "a sudden, generally unexpected occurrence." In Congress-speak, though, an emergency is something you don't want to pay for.

The amendment fully offsets the spending and tax relief provisions by enacting a series of responsible initia-

tives such as rescinding unobligated stimulus funds; cutting \$100 million out of Congress's budget; cutting wasteful and duplicative government programs—640 different instances are identified in the amendment; freezing Federal Government salaries; capping the hiring of Federal employees; cutting the budgets of Federal agencies by 5 percent—something the President and OMB Director Peter Orszag outlined on Monday; and selling unused government property and real estate.

I wish to be clear about something. Even I support some of these programs that are targeted. However, we are in a dire fiscal situation that calls for significant contributions from everyone. Government cannot be all things to all people, and some reductions must be made because it is very clear by any economist's definition that this spending is not sustainable.

We must examine our government spending and weed out the lowest priorities. We must make hard choices. That is why we are sent here. But that means establishing priorities and having the courage to make those decisions. Just look at the recent study by the Bank for International Settlements. It ranks the United States of America fourth in general government debt among developed countries, ranking only behind Greece—which is getting a lot of attention these days—Italy, and Japan. Being ranked No. 1 is not a goal we should be working to achieve, but that is certainly where we are headed if we keep spending over 40 percent more than revenues are bringing in. If we want our children and our grandchildren to have any chance at a prosperous future, we must start to make tough decisions today.

As I mentioned, another reason to support the alternative is that it does not contain tax increases. Let's take a look at the tax increases contained in the Baucus substitute. We have higher taxes on carried interest, new taxes on S corporations, and harmful retroactive taxes on other parts of the economy.

Punishing job creators with tax increases that will only stifle growth, expansion, and investment is not the recipe for success. Nearly 10 percent unemployment is high enough. Congress should not be adopting policies that will push it higher. Yet, ironically, only here in Washington would this bill be titled a "jobs bill." Plus, only in Washington, DC, does it make sense to pay for temporary, short-term extensions of tax relief with permanent tax increases. Is it any wonder so many business groups that typically support tax relief are opposed to the Baucus bill? On one hand, they need the tax relief for the rest of the year, but at the high cost of paying more taxes permanently, many are saying: Thank you, but no thanks.

Finally, the bill increases the taxes oil companies are required to pay into the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund from 8 cents to 41 cents—a fivefold increase.

At first glance, this seems reasonable given the disastrous environmental mess that is occurring in the gulf. But in this bill, the money is being used to pay for new, unrelated, more government spending.

My friends on the other side of the aisle claim the money will stay in the fund, but you can't have it both ways. You can't claim to be using the money both for gulf cleanup and to finance other spending. To do both would add an additional \$15 billion to our national debt beyond what is being claimed. It is a lot like the health care bill which pays for new entitlement by siphoning $\frac{1}{2}$ trillion in the Medicare trust fund. Its backers claim to be strengthening the trust fund, but they are double-counting the money. The extenders bill pays for new spending by siphoning \$15 billion from the oilspill cleanup funding.

This amendment offers Senators a choice between increasing our national debt when the country is crying out for fiscal responsibility versus paying for what we spend without increasing taxes or increasing the deficit—making hard choices.

I am fully aware some will come to the floor criticizing the amendment, making all sorts of claims, but I disagree. The amendment attempts to make tough choices, rational choices. We have to start somewhere.

I urge my colleagues to support the Thune amendment.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

GULF VISIT

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, this past Friday I had the opportunity to travel to the Gulf of Mexico along with three of our colleagues, including Senator MIKULSKI, my colleague from Maryland, Senator VITTER from Louisiana, and Senator MERKLEY from Florida. All of us know the importance of coasts. We represent coastal States, and we know how important it is to our economy, and we know how important it is to our way of life. I know Senator VITTER represents that area.

We wanted to visit and see firsthand the impact the BP oilspill is having on the communities in the Gulf of Mexico. I must tell my colleagues, seeing it firsthand, one can really start to understand the magnitude of this disaster. One can see the horrific impact it is having on the people of that region, and one can see the anger in their eyes and the desperation of people who are no longer working, and one can see the oil. You can see the oil all over. You can see it in the water. You see it in the marshes. You see it on the coast. It is a horrible thing to see.

We visited the area known as the Grand Isles. The Grand Isles is a beach area not too far from New Orleans. Grand Isles is a beach community. It is a city. It reminds me a little bit of Ocean City, MD. I was just thinking of

how the people of Maryland would be responding if they knew Ocean City would not be open for the season. When we saw the area of Grand Isles, it was empty. No one was on the beaches. There were some people on the beaches working, cleaning up, but no tourists, no people, no children enjoying the water. You couldn't go into the water. The disaster is having a horrible impact on the economy of not just Grand Isles but the entire region.

We then had a chance to go by boat to see Queen Bess Island and Pelican or Bird Island, which are two of the major islands that are used by birds for nesting. We saw oil. We saw oil on the booms that had been deployed. We saw oil on the rocks on the island itself, and, more tragically, we saw birds that were covered with oil. This should never have happened.

I think it just strengthened our resolve about the priorities we must have in this Senate, the priorities that government must follow. The first, of course, is to stop the flow at the wellhead because oil is gushing out into the Gulf of Mexico. What we saw, of course, is oil that had been in the water for many days, had degraded but was still gunk and still deadly to birds and certainly deadly to the economy of the region. But oil is still coming out at the wellhead.

Let me remind my colleagues that BP has tried many ways of stopping that oil from coming into the gulf. Of course, as the Presiding Officer knows from the hearings we have had in the Environment and Public Works Committee, BP said they had proven technology to deal with any of these types of spills. Well, that proven technology doesn't exist. They are trying to on the fly determine how to deal with the oil.

So now they have a process of capturing the oil that will bring in 18,000 barrels a day. Remember, BP said originally it was a 1-barrel-a-day incident, and then they increased it to 5,000 barrels a day. We now know it is closer to 40,000 barrels a day. The technology they are deploying will recover about 18,000 barrels.

They hope to be able to increase that perhaps 5,000 to 10,000 barrels, still leaving tens of thousands of barrels gushing into the Gulf of Mexico, and it will continue for several months until the relief wells are drilled. That is the current status.

Our priority, of course, is to stop the wellhead but also to contain the damages. Oil appears sometimes unexpectedly at different locations. So the game plan has to use the best technologies we have with booms and skimmers to keep the oil from reaching sensitive areas.

Admiral Watson, the Coast Guard Command, reviewed the strategy with us. While we think it is important for the command to set performance standards for BP across the board, we also think we have to have the right organizational structure.

Let me just mention one point that was troubling to us. Yes, we saw booms

that had been deployed, but they were not maintained. If they are not maintained, oil gets to the shore, killing birds and killing our environment. We have to make sure that is corrected. I thank Admiral Watson. He got back to me Saturday night. We had a conversation, along with Senator BOXER, and steps are being changed. That is why we have to have performance standards on BP oil. We have to make sure we are in control, as to making sure all technologies are deployed to protect our environment. Then, yes, we have to hold BP fully accountable for all of the damages.

We all talk about how they have to be fully accountable. But let's remind the public that BP, in getting the permit to drill, said they had proven technology to deal with any type of incident. They were not truthful on that statement. They didn't have that. So they have to be held fully accountable. We are talking about criminal investigations that will go where they may. But they clearly have to pay all of the economic and environmental damages. The economic damages are clear. We have talked to fishermen who aren't fishing this season, and they don't know if they will ever go back to fishing. We talked to one fisherman whose family has been in that business for generations. We talked to shop owners where there was nobody in the shop. We saw charter boat owners who cannot operate. BP has to be accountable to these small business owners and the property owners.

I strongly support the effort of our majority leader and the President to have BP put money into a trust fund, with independent trustees, so we can expedite the process. It doesn't do a business owner any good if he has a long list of documents he has to fill out to get the help he needs in order to keep his business afloat. Those who were victimized need to be able to get relief as soon as possible. I think an escrow fund makes a lot of sense, and \$20 billion seems like a reasonable start. I hope we will move forward. I know the President is meeting with the CEO of BP Oil on Wednesday. Tomorrow, I hope that will lead to the resolution of that issue.

Let me point out that BP also has to be held responsible for the environmental damages that will go well beyond the Gulf of Mexico. The Loop Current is bringing the oil around the Keys and to the east coast of the United States. It will affect many regions, including mine in the Mid-Atlantic. Many of our migratory wildlife travel through the gulf. We don't know whether they will be returning to Maryland. We don't know the impact it will have on our wildlife population—those who enjoy hunting and bird watching on the Eastern Shore, those who understand the importance of the diversity of our wildlife—whether we will be endangering different species. We need to document that and mitigate it.