

and he is a great member. Together we have come up with an excellent bill. The bill takes the proceeds of that carbon tax and invests it in our people, invests in clean energy, makes sure our middle class and working poor have the funds they need to pay the higher prices of electricity in the early years, and it will create jobs.

There is no question as far as what is happening to our coastal States. There is no question as far as what is happening to our farms. There is no question as to what is happening to our natural resources. There is no question what is happening to our species. Scientists predict that 50 percent of God's species will be gone if we do nothing.

When people stand here and laugh off this notion that we are facing severe climate change, I tell them: Look at some of the church groups who are supporting us. They have come together. They are with us. They understand that God's creation is at stake. There is no doubt about it.

We are the stewards of this environment. We are the ones who are supposed to protect it. Yet in this Senate, it is shrugged off as if it is a nothing burger. There are young people who are here whose future is at stake. They want to enjoy the same opportunities my generation enjoyed. We owe it to them to do better.

This nonpartisan GAO report tells us clearly that we better have a "government-wide strategic approach with strong leadership." I have to say I hope we have more people on this floor who will show that kind of leadership because the clock is ticking.

I say to every Member here—we have old ones, young ones, and middle ones: You are here at the moment that we can do something. You are here at the moment we can still do something. The Bush administration wasted 8 years by going to the courts and arguing that the Clean Air Act did not cover carbon pollution. They did nothing for 8 years. Finally, the Supreme Court ruled 5 to 4 and said: Yes, of course, it covers carbon pollution. God bless the Obama administration for moving forward in every way they can—unfortunately, without us at this point.

We will be judged harshly if we turn away. We are here now. We didn't choose this time to be born. We didn't choose the fact that this is an issue that is upon us. I don't know what is going to wake up this place, but I am going to do my best to ring the bell as often as I can.

I thank the Chair.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. WARREN). The Senator from Alaska.

SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF JAPAN'S TSUNAMI

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, today is the second anniversary of a very tragic event in Japan. An earthquake—a tsunami—claimed nearly 16,000 lives and destroyed community

infrastructure, homes, and livelihoods. Years after the fact, our prayers remain with the people of Japan for the lives which were lost and for the devastation that occurred within that country.

I had an opportunity to be in Japan in January. I had a chance to see for myself some of the devastation that Japan still faces 2 years after the 3/11 tsunami and earthquake. The pictures that so many of us recall of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear reactor. We all watched with great concern as the accident in front of us unfolded. It was truly a sense of helplessness that was brought about by an act of nature. A massive earthquake which delivered a massive wave which truly brought about massive destruction.

I also had an opportunity—after viewing the Fukushima Daiichi reactor—to travel north to a small fishing village by the name of Rikuzentakata. It was a community of about 23,000 people. That community alone lost over 1,900 residents who were swept out to sea—including an Alaskan teacher, Mr. Monty Dickson, whose life was lost. To be in this fishing village 2 years after the fact and see how this community is trying to regain its footing—not only economically but emotionally—was quite compelling. Again, Japan is dealing with the aftermath of this destruction in ways those of us here probably cannot appreciate.

From an energy perspective, the country of Japan—literally overnight—went from a nation where close to 30 percent of their energy was generated by nuclear to a point where the nuclear power that was generated was truly just shut down as everything was on pause for that nation. How a nation rearranges its energy portfolio is a situation that country is dealing with as we speak.

There were connections between Japan and the tsunami that I think are still being felt today. When that tsunami hit, the people of Alaska were on alert on our coastlines. They were waiting and wondering whether we would be impacted by the giant wave that had taken the lives of so many thousands of Japanese. Well, we didn't see the big wave, but what we did see—and what we are continuing to see—is a level of marine debris that has been carried across the currents from Japan and the Pacific Ocean to Hawaii, California, Oregon, Washington State, British Columbia, and then circling all along the coastline of my State of Alaska.

It is estimated that there is about 1.5 million tons of debris that is floating in the ocean. It was estimated by the Japanese Ministry of the Environment that there were 5 million tons of debris that washed into the ocean. They further estimated that 70 percent of that debris sank near the coast of Japan soon after the event. This is something the Japanese fishermen were greatly concerned and worried about.

What we are seeing now—as the floating debris moves its way across

the currents—is debris on the shoreline of Alaska in surprising quantities. The picture behind me is some of the debris. There is roof of a house, the bottom of a boat, and buoys. It is just a floating mass of debris in the middle of the Pacific. This is just an example of some of what we have seen over the course of 2 years now.

Sometimes the sightings are pretty phenomenal, such as this picture which was off the Oregon coast. This is actually a concrete dock that floated all the way across the ocean from Japan and landed on the coast of Oregon.

I have sons who are commercial fishermen. They spend their summers out on the water. We worry about obstacles in the water that our fishing vessels could encounter. Running into a concrete dock is not something any mariner would want to do. So we think that 2 years after the fact we should have seen most of the debris we would anticipate. In fact, the vast majority is still coming our way.

These are buoys along the Alaskan shore. This was taken on Montague Island which is just off Kodiak Island. Not all these buoys are necessarily from Japan. Some are just the general marine debris that we see. But what we have been able to determine is that the Japanese buoys are coming across. Those things that are sitting higher up on the water are moving more quickly, but things that are just below the water surface are still on their way.

How do we deal with all this? How do we reach the beaches, whether it is the beaches in Oregon, California, Hawaii or Alaska? In Alaska, we have 44,000 miles of coastline. That is a lot of territory for debris to come up on, and in so much of this area in my State, these beaches are not accessible by vehicle. They are not accessible by road. It is extraordinarily difficult to deal with the cleanup.

This is a picture of marine debris cleanup in a community by the name of Yakutat, a small fishing village along the coast. What they are finding is that as the community volunteers go out and clean what beaches they can, they have no space in their small landfills there to accommodate the debris. So it would be one thing if we knew this was all we were going to be dealing with. Our reality is we know more is coming.

How we respond is going to be key. It is going to be critical to the communities that are impacted. But for so many of these areas where there are no individuals to see this, there are none to appreciate what has happened, but still we are faced with Styrofoam, plastics, nets—incredible amounts of nets—things that will not only foul the beaches but foul the animals that may be in the area. We have a responsibility to act. So how do we do it? How do we do it at a time of difficult budgets? We all appreciate that. It requires a level of creativity, if you will—partnerships with local and government officials. It requires us to be proactive in terms of what is coming to our shores.

We have asked the White House to assist with a debris cleanup task force to get all the agencies that are involved—State, tribal, Federal—to be participants in how we address these issues.

The Government of Japan last year stepped forward and provided \$5 million to the affected States, plus an additional \$1 million to Canada—they were not obligated to provide the money for an effort to help us address the cleanups. What we need to do in this country—again, we have asked the White House to establish this interagency task force to deal with the debris that continues to come to our shore is to determine how we engage, how we are working together to help make a difference. That is going to be critical. We also don't want to forget the private interests that are potentially engaged in the cleanup. We have so many different interests, so many different industries, and private citizens who are so dependent on our navigable waterways, our healthy ecosystems. What we need is good communication and good leadership. We need a plan to guide the interagency and the public-private partnership approach to solving the challenge. I commend the NOAA Marine Debris Program for their coordination and their response to the work. The fact is they are small. They are overtasked. They need the help of their Federal partners to address this as a national priority.

So as we continue to see increased levels of debris coming over after the tsunami, it is imperative we act to address it.

It has been interesting in the Alaska press because there have been ongoing stories about the connections. We think Japan is thousands of miles away and we don't have that connection. Beachcombers found a soccer ball with the name of a Japanese boy—a 16-year-old boy and his phone number—and were able to make that call back to the village of Rikuzentakata and tell that young man, whose family lost everything in the tsunami, that we have your soccer ball here. It made it to the shore of Middleton Island in Alaska. But for that young man to have been delivered that soccer ball, after everything else he and his family owned had been wiped out, was a reminder that we are all connected and how we can be working together to help one another.

I ask unanimous consent to have this news story from the Anchorage Daily News printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of my remarks.

In Alaska, we have a lot of experience with helping our neighbors out. We will continue to work to address the issues, work to address the debris that is reaching our shore, but we do need a little bit of help from our government. We need a little bit of help when it comes to advancing this interagency task force so we can address what we are seeing in Alaska, what we are seeing on our coastline in the Pacific Northwest and in Hawaii as well.

With that, I thank the Chair and I yield the floor.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Anchorage Daily News, Mar. 9, 2013]

2 YEARS AFTER JAPAN TSUNAMI, DEBRIS SPREADS IN US

(By Becky Bohrer—Associated Press)

JUNEAU, AK.—Two years ago, the yellow buoy was hanging as part of a restaurant sign in the coastal community of Minamisanriku in northern Japan when an earthquake triggered a tsunami and washed it—and so much more—out to sea.

About a year later, the buoy was found more than 3,000 miles away on a remote Alaska island, discovered by an avid beachcomber who, through sheer coincidence, was later able to find the owner, who had lost her home and business. Hundreds of similar buoys have been found on beaches along the West Coast, a combination of the everyday trash that has plagued coastal areas for years and debris washed away by the March 11, 2011 disaster.

Distinguishing between the two is difficult. Just 21 items from among the more than 1,500 reports of possible tsunami debris have been firmly traced back to the tsunami, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The confirmed items include several derelict vessels, including a small boat found in Hawaii waters, large docks that have washed ashore in Washington state and Oregon and a motorcycle that washed ashore off the coast of British Columbia.

These are items that tend to have unique markings—names of people and places, registration numbers or other identifying information. The agency lists scores of other items along the West Coast and across the Pacific Ocean as potentially linked to the catastrophe.

The Japanese government estimated 1.5 million tons of debris was floating in the ocean in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, which devastated a long stretch of Japan's northeastern coast and killed thousands of people. But it's not clear how much is still out there or what might reach U.S. shores. NOAA has said the debris is spread over an area roughly three times the size of the contiguous United States, and that beachgoers may notice an increase in debris "over many years," in addition to what normally washes up.

Beachcombing on Middleton Island, in the northern Gulf of Alaska, has long been a favorite pastime for radar technician David Baxter and some of his colleagues. In early 2012, there had been talk about finding tsunami debris—"a wall with a safe in it or a briefcase of money, we'd always joke about that"—but Baxter said he didn't think it was realistic he'd find anything related to the tsunami, given models he'd seen at the time that suggested the debris would move much further south.

Then, in February 2012, a co-worker found a soccer ball. Baxter subsequently found another soccer ball—a discovery that made international headlines as one of the first identifiable pieces of debris to wash up—a volleyball and the buoy.

The buoy stood out to Baxter as a bit different from other buoys that have washed up. For example, it was hard, not inflatable, and had writing on it. By chance, when a Japanese film crew was visiting him and his wife after the discovery of the soccer ball, they panned on other items he'd found, including the buoy, he said. A friend of the restaurant's owner, Sakiko Miura, happened to

recognize it, and the owner later confirmed it was hers through a photo sent by Baxter.

FedEx, which flies regularly between Anchorage and Tokyo, volunteered to return items including the balls found by Baxter and the buoy last June. The team traveled by plane to Tokyo and then by train to outlying communities, hand-delivering the items, spokeswoman Sharon Young said.

"It was a wonderful experience, to reunite people with things that meant a lot to them and that survived this incredibly devastating situation," she said Friday.

Baxter and his wife were recently able to talk to Miura, who said she plans to rebuild. He said he found the owner of the soccer ball his colleague found, an 8-year-old, and plans to return it this summer.

Baxter said he can't help but be affected by what he's found. He wife is Japanese and he said he has visited the nation several times. But it's more than that.

"I wonder all the time, when you see (things) if the person was in the house, if they survived," he said, adding later: "Of course, when I see the housing insulation and household items, shampoo bottles, shaving cream bottles with Japanese writing on them, yeah, it hurts a little."

STRAW PURCHASING OF FIREARMS

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, last week I introduced bipartisan legislation with Senator COLLINS to combat the straw purchasing and trafficking of firearms. We were joined by other Senators from both sides of the aisle. We have made good progress since then. Last Thursday, the Senate Judiciary Committee voted for our bill as an amendment to the Stop Illegal Trafficking in Firearms Act, S. 54. This is the first legislative vote on measures related to gun violence in either the Senate or the House since the Newtown tragedy. Every Democratic Senator on the Committee voted in favor of our bill and we were joined in that support by the Committee's ranking Republican, Senator GRASSLEY. I appreciate Senator GRASSLEY's cooperation in getting our bill reported after weeks of consultation and I look forward to working closely with him as we move forward.

The White House called the Judiciary Committee action "an important bipartisan step" that takes on "the very serious problem of gun trafficking." At the signing of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act and Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act last Thursday, the President called the Judiciary Committee's action on our bill a "big step" and "real progress." He noted that our bill "would crack down on folks who buy guns only to turn around and funnel them to dangerous criminals."

I want to continue to make progress on this legislation and other bills that can be effective in reducing illegal gun violence in our country. We have the strong support of several leading law enforcement organizations including the Fraternal Order of Police, the FBI Agents Association, the Major Cities Chiefs Association, the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, and