

question as to what is the most effective organization we can employ for cyber security should be a focal point of the President's address.

But we should not just place these questions at the President's door. The Senate itself must consider modifying the way it considers cyber security legislation and issues.

Currently, there are at least five separate Senate committees which are responsible for various aspects of cyber security. Therefore, we, too, have a unity-of-effort issue, and the Senate should consider means to concentrate this body's expertise on this critical matter.

In conclusion, there are a myriad of questions which our government must address before we are able to state we have the most effective, efficient, and constitutional cyber security defense possible.

I hope the President fully utilizes the opportunity presented to him in his State of the Union Address to answer these important questions—and if he doesn't, we have to. So we better solve these problems. I presume the President will speak intelligently on these issues and hopefully in a way that will unify the country, unify the Congress, and get us all working in the same way.

We can't afford to let this drag any longer. This is one of the most important sets of issues we have in our country. It may be one of the most important issues or sets of issues in the world at large.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SAUDI ARABIA

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, on January 12 in Saudi Arabia a prominent human rights lawyer, Mr. Waleed Abu al-Khair, was handed a 5-year extension to his 10-year prison sentence. Mr. Abu al-Khair, who is the founder and director of the watchdog group Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia, was also fined, banned from travel outside the country for 15 years after his release, and his websites will be shut down. What were the crimes that brought about this sentence? He was charged with harming the kingdom's

reputation and insulting judicial authority, among other violations related to his non-violent activism.

This case and others like it certainly have harmed the kingdom's reputation, and insulted its judicial system, but the fault is not Mr. Abu al-Khair's.

After years of defending human rights activists as a legal advocate in Saudi courts, he was called in front of a terrorism tribunal at the end of 2013 for a trial that from its earliest days was declared a farce by human rights organizations. This was not the first time Mr. Abu al-Khair was made a target of the justice system, having first faced trial in 2011 for signing a petition that called for government reform.

During the fifth hearing in front of the terrorism tribunal he was jailed mid-trial under the January 2014 anti-terrorism law, which covers verbal acts that harm the reputation of the state. Mr. Abu al-Khair was eventually sentenced to 10 years for his activism amid growing international condemnation of Saudi repression. His decision not to disavow his beliefs led to this week's further sentencing.

Unfortunately, Mr. Abu al-Khair's case is not unique. As more Saudis have begun to speak out against government repression, the monarchy has responded by escalating its crackdown on dissent, including by using the already dubious terrorism tribunal system to punish human rights defenders.

It is ironic that while Saudi officials condemned the brutal killings of journalists at Charlie Hebdo, and their Ambassador attended the rally in Paris, their Justice Ministry was preparing to carry out the first of 1,000 public lashings of Raif Badawi. Like the cartoonists, Mr. Badawi has been accused of insulting Islam, and like them and his former lawyer, Mr. Abu al-Khair, he was simply exercising his nonviolent right of freedom of expression. Needless to say, his persecution has drawn an international outcry, including by many of those who joined the Saudi government in denouncing the attacks in Paris.

The United States and Saudi Arabia have long been strategic allies, and we want that relationship to continue. But the fundamental right of free expression cannot be a casualty of convenience. The injustices I have described must be addressed. Not only do these actions violate the Saudi government's stated policy and its commitment as a member of the UN Human Rights Council to protect human rights, but they are a flawed strategy for discouraging dissent. Ominously, as we have seen in many countries, they may cause critics of the government to resort to violence to achieve their goals.

I urge the Saudi government to release Mr. Abu al-Khair and Mr. Badawi and dismiss the spurious charges against them. This kind of repression and barbarity have no place in the 21st century.

CORN ETHANOL MANDATE ELIMINATION ACT

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I wish to submit an amendment with my colleagues, Senators TOOMEY and FLAKE to correct a major problem with the current Renewable Fuel Standard: the mandate for corn ethanol. We see two major problems with continuing to mandate the consumption of so much corn ethanol each year. The statute currently mandates more corn ethanol than can be used by the current vehicle fleet and gas stations. Roughly 40 percent of the U.S. corn crop is now used to produce ethanol, artificially pushing up food and feed prices while damaging the environment. This amendment offers a simple fix that addresses both problems: elimination of the corn ethanol mandate.

Also, the amendment leaves in place the requirement that oil companies purchase and use low-carbon advanced biofuels, including cellulosic ethanol and biodiesel. This allows the program to focus on the fuels that best address climate change and do not compete with the food supply.

Let me highlight a few of the unintended consequences of the corn ethanol mandate. The policy has led us to use roughly 40 percent of the U.S. corn crop not for food but for fuel, nearly twice the rate in 2006. Using more and more corn for ethanol—in drought years as well as years with bumper crops—places unnecessary pressure on the price of corn.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated in June 2014 that escalating the volume of corn ethanol as currently required by statute would raise the average price of corn about 6 percent by 2017. That would increase food expenditures by \$3.5 billion per year by 2017, the equivalent of about \$10 per person, which most directly affects families living on the margin.

Internationally, according to Tufts University researchers, the corn ethanol mandate has cost net corn importing countries \$11.6 billion in higher corn prices, with more than half that cost, \$6.6 billion, borne by developing countries. Higher corn prices also raise prices throughout the food supply chain by raising the cost of animal feed. For the turkey industry alone, the Renewable Fuel Standard raised feed expenses by \$1.9 billion in 2013, according to the President of the National Turkey Federation. For the restaurant industry, a recent Price-Waterhouse-Coopers study projects that the corn ethanol mandate would increase costs by up to \$3.2 billion a year. For the milk industry, the Western United Dairyman reported in 2013 that a combination of high feed costs and low milk prices put 105 dairies out of business in one year alone.

The corn ethanol mandate also has unintended environmental consequences. In 2013, an investigative report from the Associated Press found using government satellite data that 1.2 million acres of virgin land in Nebraska and the Dakotas alone were

converted to fields of corn and soybeans since 2006. Putting virgin land under cultivation has environmental consequences, including greater runoff, greater use of fertilizer, and less land available for conservation.

Another consequence of the corn ethanol mandate is that it places a regulatory requirement on oil refiners that cannot actually be satisfied—it requires more ethanol than the auto fleet and existing gas stations can accommodate, a concept called the blend wall. Under the RFS, oil refineries are required to blend 15 billion gallons of corn ethanol into the fuel supply in 2015. This far exceeds the roughly 13.5 billion gallons that our current infrastructure can accommodate. According to the Environmental Protection Agency's final 2013 rule, the "EPA does not currently foresee a scenario in which the market could consume enough ethanol to meet the volumes stated in the statute." The Congressional Budget Office confirmed this judgment in its June 2014 report, saying that the statutory goal of escalating corn ethanol volumes would be "very hard to meet in future years."

Chevron, which operates oil refineries in my home State, is also concerned that the statutory mandate requires too much ethanol. It is Chevron's judgment that "the required volume of renewable fuel exceeds the amount that can be safely blended into transportation fuels used by consumers." Facing this difficulty, the EPA has been unable to finalize the volume requirements for 2014 or 2015. This leaves the businesses seeking to develop advanced biofuel ventures without any certain prospects to guide their investments and undermines the primary purpose of the Renewable Fuel Standard.

The Corn Ethanol Mandate Elimination Act would address the blend wall directly, thereby allowing EPA to continue increasing volumes of low carbon advanced biofuel.

The corn industry, by contrast, does not depend on the RFS for its livelihood. In fact, the Congressional Budget Office predicts that refiners will continue to blend corn ethanol into the fuel supply in the absence of a mandate, because ethanol is the oil refiner's preferred octane booster and oxygenate.

Ultimately, I believe that this bill would better serve the advanced biofuel industry by removing the blend wall as an obstacle to the industry's expansion, and providing the regulatory certainty that they need to guide their investments. These advanced biofuels have none of the same problems as corn ethanol. They do not compete directly with food, and they reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50 percent compared to petroleum.

I am also fundamentally committed to the vitally important public health and climate protections provided by the Clean Air Act. That is why I would like to make it crystal clear that this

legislation is a narrow bill repealing the corn ethanol mandate. The bill's language explicitly clarifies that the legislation has no effect on the low-carbon advanced biofuel provisions in the Renewable Fuel Standard, and I would oppose any bill that would amend, revise or weaken the advanced biofuel provisions or other public health protections provided by the Clean Air Act.

The elimination of the corn ethanol mandate is a smart, simple reform with support from the prepared food industry, the dairy, beef, and poultry industries, the oil and gas industries, hunger relief organizations, and environmental groups.

The bill solves the problems of the Renewable Fuel Standard while maintaining the provisions that encourage the development, growth, and deployment of cellulosic ethanol, algae-based fuel, biodiesel, and other low-carbon advanced biofuels.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

JOHNSON CITY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

• Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, this year marks the centennial year of the establishment of the Johnson City Chamber of Commerce.

Since its establishment on July 6, 1915, the chamber has served as the leading voice for local business and community development. The chamber has been instrumental in transforming Johnson City from a small rail-shipping town in the early 1900s to a distinguished medical community over the past several decades and continues to lead the way for new business, trade, and growth in upper East Tennessee.

As we see around the country, the Federal Government has been throwing a big, wet blanket of burdensome regulations on businesses and the economy, and chambers of commerce around the Nation have been leaders in advocating to get Washington out of the way and unleash our free enterprise system. The best thing we can do for job creation is to remove these regulations so businesses and entrepreneurs will be able to get our economy moving again.

We need to be working to help our job creators put people back to work, and we thank the Johnson City chamber for its work to help Tennessee businesses and employees, and for all it has done to help Johnson City succeed and continue to thrive.

With a new Republican majority, we will work with the chamber to advance our shared goals to jump-start our economy and liberate our free market so businesses in Tennessee and around the Nation will have the freedom they need to get our economy going in the right direction.●

VERMONT ESSAY WINNERS

• Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, since 2010 I have sponsored a State of the Union essay contest for Vermont students. The contest, now in its fifth year, is an opportunity for Vermont students to articulate what issues they would prioritize if they were President of the United States. A panel of Vermont teachers reviewed all of the essays submitted and selected the top twenty. I am proud to say that more than 400 students wrote essays for this year's State of the Union contest.

I would like to congratulate each and every finalist, and to specifically acknowledge Leo Lehrer-Small as this year's winner of the contest. I would also like to recognize Ryan Taggard for placing second and Craig Pelsor and Hadley Menk for placing third. I ask to have printed in the RECORD the winning essays.

The essays follow.

LEO LEHRER-SMALL, MOUNT MANSFIELD UNION HIGH SCHOOL (WINNER)

As we enter the year of 2015, there is one issue in particular that our government, in conjunction with global policy makers, need to address with attention and urgency. This issue, quite simply, is the safety of our planet: global climate change is already affecting the environment through droughts, increasingly frequent heat waves, and rising sea levels. It is a scientific fact that climate change is man-made, even though some politicians still deny the part that humans play in the issue.

As the most powerful country in the world, the US must be a driving force in halting global climate change. The question is: how do we go about doing this? In order to fix our growing crisis, we must first understand the roots of the problem. Last year's report released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change showed that the recent rise of temperature is due to an excess of greenhouse gases that humans have released into our atmosphere. And to quote the Environmental Protection Agency, "The largest source of greenhouse gas emissions from human activities in the United States is from burning fossil fuels for electricity, heat, and transportation." So it is clear; the root of our problem is our overuse of fossil fuels.

We must take drastic measures to reduce our fossil fuel consumption. Congress must make and pass bills that finance green energy projects. Government subsidies which are currently being given to the oil and gas industries should be given to the renewable energy industry. This boost would allow renewable and clean energy sources such as wind and solar to provide more of the nation's energy, and in return lower our usage of fossil fuels. The growth of clean energy usage in the US would not only play a role in climate change reversal, but also provide millions of safe jobs for American workers.

Furthermore, our government should heavily tax the large greenhouse gas producers; companies that burn cheap fossil fuels to make massive amounts of money. These are the main contributors to climate change. These are the corporations that we must limit through a tax on carbon dioxide. Such a tax would not only discourage the burning of fossil fuels, but the money may also be invested in the redevelopment of clean energy.

And as one of the leaders in our global economy, the rest of the world will look to us to initiate the transition towards clean energy usage. We have the opportunity to