

emergency for Los Angeles County due to the Aliso Canyon natural gas leak. State regulators have been working with the gas company and with Federal PHMSA and EPA. PHMSA is hazardous pipeline. They check to make sure those hazardous pipelines—the pipelines that carry this hazardous material—are safe. They have been working as they have been providing consultation.

I want to say that the working group on climate change called in the Federal people who were working in PHMSA and the EPA. They are doing conference calls and they are working, but it is not enough. It is not enough. We need the best minds—the best minds—and that is why Senator FEINSTEIN and I have offered this amendment today. It is at the desk.

Under the amendment, the Department of Energy Secretary would lead a broad review of this leak, including the cause, the response, and the impacts on communities and the environment. They will issue a finding to all of us, all of our committees, as we listen, and to the President, within 6 months, but if they find something in the course of their investigation that can solve this leak or prevent another leak—in the Presiding Officer's State or anybody's State—they would have to come forward and make it clear and report that finding.

The task force includes representatives of PHMSA—the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration—Department of Health and Human Services, Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and the Department of Commerce. We have a small task force here. Is it now seven? Seven. The reason is, we don't want some big bureaucracy. We want a small task force to meet, headed by Secretary Moniz, who is an outstanding scientist, and we want them to help solve this crisis and provide relief for the thousands of affected residents when they come in with their analysis. We want to make sure—we want to make sure—this doesn't happen again in anybody's State, because when you have a constituent like this in your State who comes out and says: My God, I don't know what to do, that is what is on this face. I don't know what to do. I am scared. My kids are breathing this. I am breathing this. Where do I go? So we need our brightest minds, absolutely, dealing with this, and that is what our amendment does.

Again, we have more than 400 underground natural gas storage facilities. We have nine in California. This is a public health and public safety issue that is critical for people not only in my State but across the Nation.

Again, we know our most sacred responsibility is to keep our people safe. Whenever we say that, people right away think about what is happening abroad and homeland security and taking on ISIL and doing everything we have to do to keep our people safe. We

have the Super Bowl coming up in my beautiful State. Believe me, we are focused on that. This is a great nation. We know how to take care of our people. Therefore, when we see a woman or children like this saying they are sick and we see this—and this is what the people of California are seeing in their living rooms, the picture of this out-of-control plume going on since October 23—we think: Wait a minute. This is the greatest country in the world, with the greatest minds in the world, the greatest science in the world. We have so many wonderful things, and we can't stop this leak? My God. It is ridiculous.

I was frustrated after I had that meeting because we are very much alike in many ways. We want to solve a problem, and we don't want bureaucracy to get in the way. We want to get the best people. Who cares who gets the credit? Sit around and get it done. When I had this meeting with those Federal officials who were on these conference calls, I got a clear sense, after all my years of experience—and I have had a lot. When I started out, I didn't have all this gray hair.

The bottom line is, I know from experience that it doesn't feel like somebody is truly in charge. That is why Senator FEINSTEIN and I are giving this amendment all of our heart and soul. We hope that our friends on the other side will sign off on it because I know the Democratic side has. I believe they will. We are working with them right now on a couple of issues.

If this passes and becomes the law of the land, we will finally have someone in charge here at the Federal level, someone so bright, so smart—Secretary Moniz. I have a lot of faith in him. I think a lot of us do. He is in it for the right reasons. I think if he goes in there and they start to take a look at this, they may well find something right away that has been overlooked that could stop this horrific leak.

I want to close with this: Californians are leaders in so many areas—technology, entertainment, and trade. We would be the seventh or eighth largest economy in the world.

I don't want to be a leader showing the way to the future with this kind of a travesty. I want to solve the problem. I want to tell my friends here in the Senate that we have the technology to solve it; we have leak-detection systems to find these problems before they happen. This particular yard started in the fifties. If you built a house in the fifties, you have to keep making improvements. I don't know the history of all of this, and I am not getting into that now. We are where we are. But I would suggest that if this natural gas yard was set up in the fifties, I don't think there were a lot of homes around at that time. Let's be clear. We have to think about these things, where we place these facilities. If I were in another State right now—and I am going to do this in California: I am going to look at the eight other facilities in my State. God forbid, if they have a leak,

what is going to happen and how can we prevent it? Maybe there is an easy way to maintain these pipes in a way that makes sense. If we can find that out, we can stop this. We can say: This was horrible. We stopped it, and we are going to be able to prevent other explosions like this from happening. And if they do happen, we will know how to deal with it.

We are not going to subject kids to this where they have to go out with signs—and, by the way, masks around their necks—that say “relocate our school” and “sick of being sick at school” and dislocate these kids, and they have been dislocated. They have been dislocated from their school. You know how it is for a kid. You have your world. Your world is your home. Your world is your school. Your world is your family. That is it. When you disrupt that, it is very difficult on our children.

I hope and pray that we will get this done today and that we will get the Department of Energy ready to go on this. Even if we pass it here and we don't get it quickly to the House and they don't do it quickly, I think we will send a signal to the Department of Energy that they can look at this now and help in a way where they would have the confidence that we would all be behind that here in the Senate.

I am looking forward to a vote on this. I hope we have a voice vote. We don't need a recorded vote on something like this. I am going to continue to work with the Republican leaders on this. I hope we can move forward.

I thank you so much for your patience and your time.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

ENERGY POLICY MODERNIZATION BILL

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, one of the things the Republicans were determined to do when we took the majority in the Senate last January was to get the Senate working again for American families.

Under Democratic control, the Senate had basically ground to a halt. The Democratic leadership spent its time pushing partisan show votes instead of putting in any real work on the challenges that are facing our Nation. Republicans were committed to changing that. Since we took the majority last January, we have worked hard to once again make the Senate a place for serious debate and serious legislation. We have succeeded.

Last year we passed a number of significant bipartisan bills, including a

major reform of No Child Left Behind and a multiyear transportation bill that will strengthen our infrastructure and put Americans to work.

This week we are beginning consideration of a bipartisan energy bill to modernize our Nation's energy policies for the 21st century. This bill is the product of months of work by Republican and Democratic Senators and staffers on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Senators held four full committee hearings and spent countless hours hammering out the legislation that is before us today. This bill is a great example of the kind of substantive, bipartisan legislation we can produce when the Senate is working the way it is supposed to work.

Among many other things, this bill will streamline the application process to make it easier for American companies to export liquefied natural gas. The natural gas industry in the United States has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years, and our economy will benefit tremendously when U.S. companies start exporting American liquefied natural gas this year. Liquefied natural gas exports from the United States will also strengthen our allies in Europe by allowing them to rely on the United States for their import needs instead of relying on aggressive nations like Russia.

I have also submitted several amendments to this bill, including an amendment to streamline the permitting process for wind development. American wind developers cite permitting delays as one of the chief obstacles to development of this clean energy source. My amendment will remove this roadblock and allow wind generation and the jobs that it creates to move forward more quickly.

I have also submitted an amendment that would examine whether hydroelectric dams in places like the Missouri River in my home State of South Dakota could be paired with future hydrokinetic generation to better harness the great energy potential of our rivers.

I have submitted an amendment to prevent the Environmental Protection Agency from moving ahead with a lower ground-level ozone standard until 85 percent of the U.S. counties that are not yet able to meet the old smog standard are able to meet the old requirements. We should prioritize the worst cases of smog in America before imposing significant economic burdens or limiting energy generation in other areas.

One thing Republicans always say when we talk about energy is that we need an "all of the above" energy policy. What do we mean by that? We mean that we need to focus on developing all of our Nation's energy resources, from renewable fuels, such as wind and solar, to traditional sources of energy, such as oil and natural gas. That is the only way to make sure Americans have access to a stable, reliable energy supply and to keep our energy sector thriving.

The bill we are considering today is an "all of the above" energy bill. It invests in a wide range of clean energies, from nuclear, to hydroelectric, to geothermal. It supports traditional sources of energy. It modernizes our Nation's electrical grid. It promotes energy efficiency. It encourages conservation. That is the kind of energy policy we need to take our energy sector into the 21st century.

Unfortunately, the President has repeatedly blocked domestic energy development and the jobs it would create. He rejected the Keystone XL Pipeline—a project that his own State Department found would have virtually no impact on the environment and that would have supported 42,000 jobs during construction. He has blocked attempts to tap our vast domestic oil reserves in Alaska. His EPA has imposed a steady stream of burdensome regulations that are making it more expensive to produce American energy. The President's national energy tax will drive up energy bills for poor and middle-class families and reduce our Nation's energy security, while doing very little to help our environment. Similarly, the President's waters of the United States rule will place heavy regulatory burdens on farmers, ranches, homeowners, and small businesses across the country.

President Obama might like to think that the United States can rely on a few boutique renewable energies, but the truth is that our Nation is simply not there yet. Efforts to impede other, more traditional and reliable types of energy production simply punish American families who then face soaring energy prices and fewer jobs in the energy sector.

Robust domestic energy production coupled with commonsense energy efficiency measures will create jobs, enhance the reliability of our energy supply, spur economic development, and help keep energy costs low. Those are the kinds of energy policies that this bill supports.

Last Friday we learned that the economy grew at a rate of seven-tenths of 1 percent in the fourth quarter of 2015. Needless to say, that is not where we need to be in terms of economic growth. The recession may have technically ended 6½ years ago, but our economy has never fully rebounded. Economic growth has been persistently weak during the Obama recovery, and there are no signs of substantial improvement in the near future. In historical terms, the Obama recovery is the weakest economic recovery since the Eisenhower administration. If you rank the 66 years since 1950 in terms of economic growth, the Obama years rank 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th, 54th, 55th, and 66th. Let me repeat that. If you rank the 66 years since 1950 in terms of economic growth, the Obama years rank 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th, 54th, 55th, and 66th—or dead last. It is no wonder the American people are tired of living in the Obama economy.

Given this weak economic growth, removing impediments to energy development is more important than ever. A thriving energy sector can help us overcome the weakness of the Obama recovery and usher in a new era of stronger economic growth.

According to former CBO Director Douglas Holtz-Eakin, the difference between a 2.5-percent growth rate and a 3.5-percent growth rate would have a major impact on the quality of life for low- and middle-income families. If our economy grew at just 1 percentage point faster per year, we would have 2½ million more jobs and average incomes would be nearly \$9,000 higher—\$9,000 higher. That is the difference between owning your own home and renting one. It is the difference between being able to send your kids to college and forcing them to go deeply into debt to pay for their education. It is the difference between a secure retirement and being forced to work well into old age. Additionally, an additional percentage point in economic growth will reduce our annual deficits by \$300 billion. That in turn would further improve the health of our economy.

The American people have suffered long enough in the Obama economy. They are ready for a new era of strong economic growth; an era built upon free enterprise, not big government programs; an era that focuses on growth, opportunity, and income mobility, not redistribution of shrinking economic resources; an era that rewards innovators and entrepreneurs rather than punishes them.

Over the next year, Americans who are ready for a change from Obama's failed policies will hear from congressional Republicans who are increasingly focused on getting our economy working again. Reforming our Tax Code and reining in regulations, repealing and replacing ObamaCare, strengthening our international security by rebuilding our military, and reforming outdated poverty programs will be the foundation of our agenda for a more prosperous future.

Americans will also continue to hear from a Republican-led Senate that it is focused on moving bipartisan bills to improve economic security for American families. The bill before us today is one of those bills. It will help consumers use less energy and free up energy producers to develop resources and create jobs.

I am glad the Senate is focused on an "all of the above" energy approach that supports energy growth and development in this country. I thank Senator MURKOWSKI for her leadership and work on this bill. I look forward to working on more bills here in the Senate that will strengthen economic security for American families. That is what we should be about—better, more robust growth in the American economy that creates better paying jobs for American workers and families.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts is recognized.

Mr. MARKEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Hearing none, it is so ordered.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG ADDICTION

Mr. MARKEY. Madam President, I am here to talk about a public health epidemic that kills more people in the United States every year than gun violence or motor vehicle accidents. Last year, drug overdoses killed nearly 50,000 Americans. Almost 60 percent of those overdoses were caused by prescription opioids or heroin. Drug overdoses are increasing the death rate of young adults in the United States to levels not experienced since the AIDS epidemic, more than 20 years ago. These skyrocketing death rates make them the first generation since the time of the Vietnam war to experience higher death rates in early adulthood than the generation that preceded them.

So we ask ourselves: What specifically is causing this tidal wave of addiction and overdoses? Well, the answer is clear. Over the last 10 years, the Drug Enforcement Agency has increased the amount of oxycodone it has approved for manufacturing by 150 percent.

For 2016, the DEA has told Big Pharma it is OK to make nearly 1.4 million grams of oxy. That is enough for almost 15 billion 10-milligram pills. Let me say that again: That is enough for almost 15 billion 10-milligram pills to be sold in America this year. That is a full bottle of potent painkillers for every man, woman, and child in the United States of America for 2016. This tsunami of opioid addiction is swallowing families as quickly as Big Pharma wants Americans to swallow its pills. Yet, despite this raging epidemic, you would think the Food and Drug Administration, the agency responsible for the safety of all prescription drugs in the United States, would welcome every bit of expert advice it can get from doctors and other public health professionals. In fact, the FDA's own rules call for it to establish an independent advisory committee of experts to assist the agency when it considers a question that is controversial or of great public interest, such as whether to allow a new addictive prescription painkiller to be marketed in the United States. Instead, the FDA has put up a sign in its window: "No Help Wanted." The FDA began turning its back on advisory committees in 2013 when an expert panel established to review the powerful new opioid painkiller Zohydro voted 11 to 2 against recommending its approval, but the FDA approved the drug anyway, overruling the concerns voiced by experienced physicians on the panel. Those experts criticized the agency for ignoring this incredible growing epidemic. The advisory panel warned that this Oxycontin

epidemic—this heavily abused prescription painkiller that the FDA first approved back in 1995—needed a new test for safety. They warned about the growing dangers of addiction, abuse, and dependence associated with the entire class of opioid painkillers. Justifiably, the FDA was lambasted for its decision to approve Zohydro by public health experts, doctors, Governors, and Members of Congress. But despite the warning of real-world dangers of abuse and dependence on these new supercharged opioid painkillers, the FDA willfully blinded itself to warning signs.

In 2014, in the wake of the Zohydro decision, the FDA twice skipped the advisory committee process altogether when it approved the new prescription opioids Targiniq and Hysingla. Then, in August 2015, the FDA did it again. This time it bypassed an advisory committee on the question of a new use for Oxycontin for children aged 11 to 16. This time the FDA even ignored its own rules that specifically called for an advisory committee when a question of pediatric dosing is involved. In other words, there is a special category when children are involved that calls for advisory committees, and the FDA ignored that.

At this point it became clear that the FDA was intentionally choosing to forgo an advisory committee in order to avoid another overwhelming vote recommending against approval of a prescription opioid. Why? Because the FDA would then have had to ignore yet another group of experts in order to continue its relentless march to put more drugs into the marketplace.

With the Oxycontin-for-kids decision, the FDA's reckless attitude toward expert advice on drug safety went too far. Children whose brains are not yet fully developed are especially vulnerable to drug dependency and abuse. Yet the agency focused its so-called safety analysis only on concerns about proper dosing, saying that it needed only to tell doctors the proper doses for children who needed the drug.

Well, that is just plain wrong. We use experts to determine if child car seats are safe, if toothpaste is safe, and if vaccines are safe. We should use experts to determine if the opioid painkillers are safe for our families. We need to immediately reform the Food and Drug Administration opioid approval process if we want to stop this epidemic of prescription drug and heroin addiction.

Last week I placed a hold on the nomination of Dr. Robert Califf to head the FDA. Before I can support this nomination, the FDA must make three needed changes to its opioid approval process. First, the FDA needs to make sure that every opioid approval question is reviewed by an external panel of experts. Second, the FDA needs to consider addiction, abuse, and dependence as part of its determination of whether an opioid is safe. The FDA cannot continue to operate as if safety just means

dosage, when it should include all of the dangers, as well, of these painkillers. And third, the FDA should rescind its decision on Oxycontin for kids and then convene an advisory panel, as it should have done in the first place. Then the FDA can consider the Oxycontin-for-kids decision with the benefit of that panel's independent advice and with the proper meaning of safety in mind.

The FDA must commit to shift the way it approaches and evaluates addiction before I can consider supporting Dr. Califf's nomination.

The prescription drug and heroin epidemic knows no geographic boundaries, and our response should know no political boundary. That is why Majority Leader MITCH MCCONNELL and I worked together to identify solutions to this crisis. Last spring, Senator MCCONNELL and I joined together in calling for a Surgeon General's report on the opioid crisis.

Last fall, Surgeon General Vivek Murthy announced that he will be issuing a new report on the substance abuse crisis this year. Fifty years ago, there was a historic report on smoking that changed the way our country viewed that. This is the same kind of report that we need from our Surgeon General for our country to see, but that is just the first step in a larger comprehensive national strategy that I am fighting for this year.

We need to stop the overprescription of pain medication that is leading to heroin addiction and fueling this crisis. That starts with the prescribers. We need to ensure that all prescribers of opioid painkillers are educated about the dangers of addiction and appropriate and responsible prescribing practices.

I have a bill that requires every prescriber of opioid pain medication in this country, as a condition of receiving their DEA prescribing license, to be trained in the best practices of using pain medications and methods to identify and manage an opioid-use disorder. Stopping overprescription also includes narrowing the pipeline at the front end.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROUNDS). The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to continue for 2 additional minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, this means that the DEA needs to reduce the quotas of oxycodone and hydrocodone that it approves for manufacture each year. The DEA is allowing Big Pharma to manufacture too many of these pain pills. Although the United States is less than 5 percent of the world's population, Americans consume 80 percent of the global supply of opioid painkillers and 99 percent of the world's supply of hydrocodone, the active ingredient in Vicodin. Tragically,