

Chernobyl involved 60 immediate deaths and radiation exposures that, according to the World Health Organization, may eventually result in 4,000 cancers. But Chernobyl was a completely different kind of accident and the result of different technology.

More than that, the Soviets had not built a containment structure at Chernobyl. The containment structures at these Japanese reactors—40 to 80 inches thick concrete and steel—appear, as we speak this afternoon, to have withstood an 8.9 magnitude earthquake, tsunami, power failure, and explosion.

There are gas and oil fires raging in Japan. Water and sewer systems are damaged. The possibility of disease and starvation is imminent. There are a great many things to worry about in addition to the problems with the Japanese reactors. There are tens of thousands of people still unaccounted for. Right now, the effort needs to be helping those who need help, containing further damage and risk, and getting Japan back up and running again. Then we can take the lessons learned from this earthquake and tsunami and apply them to make our nuclear plants as safe as possible and help the world do the same.

America's 104 nuclear reactors provide, as I mentioned earlier, 20 percent of our electricity, 70 percent of our clean electricity. Japan has 54 reactors and gets 30 percent of its electricity from nuclear. France gets 80 percent of its electricity from nuclear power. The United States invented nuclear power, but the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has not issued a construction license for a new reactor in more than 30 years. There are 65 reactors under construction around the world. However, only one of those 65 is in the United States, and that is the construction of a previously halted project by the Tennessee Valley Authority.

The Japanese and the French have surged into the lead in terms of nuclear power and are now being challenged by Korea and Russia on the international market. China, with 27 nuclear reactors currently under construction, will soon join them all.

Nuclear power today provides about 15 percent of the world's electricity. While there are always risks with every form of energy, it is important that we be clear about the risks each type of energy poses. But it is also important to remember that we do not abandon highway systems because bridges and overpasses collapse during earthquakes. The 1.6 million of us who fly daily would not stop flying after a tragic airplane crash. We cannot stop drilling after a tragic oilspill unless we want to rely more on foreign oil, run up our prices, turn our oil drilling over to a few big oil companies and all our oil hauling over to more leaky tankers. Mr. President, 34,000 people die in motor vehicle accidents every year, but we do not stop driving because we have to get our children to school and our-

selves to work. In all of these cases, when there are accidents, we do our best to examine the tragedies and make our continued operation and our lives as safe as possible. That is what we need to do here.

Our reactors in the United States are built to the highest standards in the world. The Chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission said in a press briefing today:

Right now we believe that the nuclear powerplants in this country operate safely and securely.

The Chairman said:

Nuclear powerplants in the United States are designed to very high standards for earthquake effects. All our plants are designed to withstand significant natural phenomena, like earthquakes, tornadoes, tsunamis. We will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure the safety and security of nuclear powerplants in the country. But right now, we believe we have a very strong program in place.

"As we get more information from Japan," said the Chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, "as this immediate crisis ultimately comes to an end, we will look at whatever information we can gain from this event and see if there are any changes we need to make in our system."

The Deputy Secretary of Energy said: Nuclear power has been a critical component of the United States energy portfolio.

The White House press secretary, on behalf of President Obama, said:

Nuclear power remains a part of the President's overall energy plan.

Despite the fact that there has never been a death as a result of the operation of a commercial American reactor or in our nuclear Navy, which has been using reactors in its ships and submarines since the 1950s, our goal should be to continue every effort to try to make certain the operation of our existing and new nuclear powerplants are as safe as possible.

For example, some have suggested that so-called passive cooling systems that operate on natural convection could prevent the problems that arose in Japan when the backup power to pump water was lost.

Nuclear power is a demanding but manageable technology. As we move forward, let us learn the proper lessons from this Japanese experience to make sure that in the United States and in the world, we are even better prepared for the unexpected events of the future.

I thank the Chair, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF JAMES EMANUEL BOASBERG TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of James Emanuel Boasberg, of the District of Columbia, to be United States District Judge.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 1 hour of debate, equally divided and controlled between the two leaders and their designees.

The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, today the Senate will finally consider a judicial nomination I have been talking about since last year. Judge Boasberg is one of four nominees to the vacancies that have plagued the district court for the District of Columbia, this Nation's Capital for some time. This is another of the nominations that could—and in my view should—have been considered and confirmed last year. Instead, it was unnecessarily returned to the President without final Senate action despite the nominee's qualifications and the needs of the American people to have judges available to hear cases in the Federal courts. The President has had to renominate Judge Boasberg, the Senate Judiciary Committee has had to reconsider him and now, finally, the Senate is being allowed to consider him.

I suspect the Senate will now confirm him unanimously or nearly so. Judge Boasberg has outstanding credentials. He was appointed to be a judge in DC by President George W. Bush in 2002. He has a wealth of experience, having presided over approximately 500 cases. He is a former assistant U.S. attorney, and received the highest peer review rating of well qualified from the Standing Committee on the Federal Judiciary of the American Bar Association.

Yet as we proceed with this nomination, Senate Republicans have objected to proceeding to the nomination of Amy Jackson. Both Judge Boasberg and Ms. Jackson were reported without opposition by the Judiciary Committee last year and, again, earlier this year. I have spoken about the vacancies in the District of Columbia on numerous occasions, including as recently as last week. I noted the criticism from Chief