

not as familiar with the condition of the nuclear powerplant, so I will not go there. I trust my friend's judgment. There are some serious issues raised—a different design of the plant—and the fact that it is close or identical to the design of the plant in Japan that had all the issues. Here is the point. I support the Senator. I was proud of the way he questioned the issues.

I will pose a question to the Senator. Isn't it true that there is a lot of talk around Washington about how States rights should be protected?

Mr. SANDERS. I tell my good friend from California, day after day, we hear from some of our colleagues how they don't trust the Federal Government and they don't want the Federal Government getting involved in the issues impacting their constituents. So the answer to the Senator's question is yes.

Mrs. BOXER. Building on that, isn't it true that the NRC—as we have learned by reading their founding documents—is an independent commission; isn't that a fact?

Mr. SANDERS. Yes, that is true.

Mrs. BOXER. I say to my friend, given those two points, plus the ones my friend made, it seems untenable that the NRC, which is supposed to be an independent agency, would assert itself into a matter between the State of Vermont and a private company. I just say, as chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee, how strongly I support what the Senator is trying to do, which is to allow his State to, frankly, have a say over something as important as the economics surrounding energy. My friend knows we work hard in this day and age to make sure America can leap forward and save energy and lead the world and invent alternatives.

In light of what happened in Japan, this becomes more and more important. I hope my friend will take heart and know that this chairman of the committee stands with him on this battle.

Mr. SANDERS. I thank Senator BOXER for her thoughts and the extraordinary leadership she is providing on the Environment Committee.

I think everyone understands that the function of the NRC is very simple. It is to make sure the 104 nuclear powerplants in this country run as safely as possible. That is their job. Their job is not to tell the State of Vermont or the State of California or the State of Pennsylvania what future they might want to pursue in terms of energy. They are not supposed to be a proponent of the nuclear industry. That is not their job. Their job is to make sure our nuclear plants are being run safely. So in terms of economics, the people of Vermont or any other State in this country have the right to determine what the future of nuclear powerplants is in their State. What our State is saying is, after 40 years, we want to shut down Vermont Yankee. We want to move in a new direction that we

think benefits our State. We do not want the Department of Justice to intervene in this case, where Entergy is suing Vermont.

Let me conclude, while we are on the issue of nuclear power, and point out that the Associated Press recently revealed that 48 out of 65 nuclear power sites in this country have leaked radioactive tritium, and Vermont Yankee is one of those sites. Thirty-seven facilities had leaks at levels that violated Federal drinking water standards, and some leaks have migrated off the sites, contaminating private wells, although none is yet known to have contaminated public drinking water supplies.

These allegations by the Associated Press are extremely disturbing. Safety at our nuclear plants should be the most important priority at the NRC, particularly after what we saw happen in Japan. The function of the NRC is not to represent the nuclear power industry; it is to represent the needs of the people of the United States.

That is why I will be working as a member of the Environment Committee, which has oversight over the NRC, with our chairperson, Senator BARBARA BOXER, and others on the committee who are interested in this issue, to call for a GAO investigation of the allegations made by the Associated Press. We need to determine whether it is true that the NRC is systematically working with the industry to undermine safety standards for aging plants in order to keep them operating.

Let me conclude by mentioning that around the world there is growing concern about the dangers of nuclear power, and I think that concern has been heightened by the terrible tragedy in Japan. It is important to note that Germany has decided to close all 17 nuclear plants in the next decade and not to build any new ones. They are getting out of the nuclear business. Switzerland is also phasing out nuclear power. In Italy, just a few weeks ago, 94 percent of the people voted in an election against restarting the nuclear power industry.

Here in the United States, some States are moving in the same direction. In addition to Vermont, New York, led by Governor Cuomo, wants the Indian Point plant shut down. Massachusetts is supporting Vermont in its lawsuit to preserve States rights to decide their own energy future, and I believe other States will support us as well.

The bottom line—and the law supports this—is that if States such as Vermont want to move away from aging and troubled nuclear reactors and to a sustainable energy future, we have the right to do that. I will fight tooth and nail to protect that right.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio is recognized.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REVITALIZATION ACT

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. President, Senate Republicans, in their typically unanimous way, just blocked this Chamber from even voting on the Economic Development Revitalization Act of 2011.

We heard Senator BOXER point out how many Republicans have supported the Economic Development Administration many times in what they did for economic development in their States. We know in Vermont, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, how EDA works with small Federal investments, leveraging that money in the private sector through incubators, in many cases, or accelerators or whatever the communities call them, and they do, in fact, create jobs. Unfortunately, every Republican in this Chamber decided that wasn't such a good thing—perhaps to deny a political victory to President Obama. What it did was take away another tool to get this economy back on course.

So many people in this body seem to think it is all about reducing the debt. It is about reducing the debt, but it needs to be largely about creating jobs. There doesn't seem to be that much interest in that on the other side of the aisle.

Just last week, I spoke with economic development directors and county commissioners from the city of Moraine, a suburb of Dayton where a GM plant closed, and Ashtabula County, my wife's home county in the northeast corner of the State. They explained the importance of EDA funding and how it supports economic growth in their communities.

EDA has traditionally been a non-controversial and bipartisan job-creation bill. It helps broker deals between the public and private sectors, which is critical to economic growth and recovery. It is particularly important to economically distressed communities and in these types of economic times.

Every \$1 of EDA grant funding leverages \$7 worth of private investment. For every \$10,000—and this is one study, proven by evidence and fact—of EDA investment in business incubators, which helps entrepreneurs start companies, between 50 and 70 jobs are created. When we put money into the Youngstown incubator or a bit of Federal money into LaunchHouse in Shaker Heights—an incubator just launched, if you will—it creates jobs. It helps entrepreneurs and startup companies create jobs in our communities. Some of these businesses will fail. A few of them will wildly succeed. Many will hang on for several years, hiring 5, 10, 20 or maybe hundreds of people.

In Ohio, since 2006, more than 40 EDA grants worth \$36 million have leveraged a total of more than \$87 million once private resources were matched.

Colleges and universities from Bowling Green in the northwest to Ohio University in the southeast, to Miami

in the southwest, have received EDA funds. So too have port authorities in Toledo and Ashtabula—the Presiding Officer's border with Erie—in that part of Ohio and entrepreneurs in Cleveland and Appalachia.

If we are going to strengthen our competitiveness, communities will need to equip businesses with the tools they need to survive, and communities will need to create higher skill, living wage jobs and attract private investment.

That is what EDA is designed to do; it is the “front door” for communities facing sudden and severe economic distress.

When economic disaster hits, communities turn to the government, and in so many cases it is EDA that does the job.

EDA has helped redevelop the former GM plant in Moraine—several thousand GM jobs, Frigidaire jobs. Because of EDA, local partnerships, and outside private investments, we expect to see hundreds and hundreds, maybe a few thousand jobs in manufacturing in that Moraine plant. We have seen EDA help redevelop the DHL plant in Wilmington. Ashtabula's Plant C received EDA investments to make vital repairs. The bill Republicans just blocked us from even voting on would have strengthened a proven job-creating program.

How many times do we hear about businesses worried about uncertainty created in a still recovering economy? This bill would have provided certainty in funding for an established job-creating problem. It would have reduced regulatory burdens to increase flexibility for grantees. It would have encouraged public-private partnerships that we have already seen make a difference across Ohio.

I offered two amendments that would have further strengthened EDA. One would have assisted former auto communities when a plant closure or downsizing causes economic distress, such as Wilmington or Moraine.

The other would have made more Ohio communities eligible to receive funds for business incubators. Ohio is the home of the National Business Incubator Association—the trade association for all incubators in southeast Ohio and Athens. We have a model for business incubators in Toledo, Youngstown, and now Shaker Heights.

This amendment would have allowed more Ohio communities to support homegrown entrepreneurship.

Republican Senators chose to bog down the EDA bill with other unrelated amendments. All of them were unrelated to the task at hand; that is, how do we create jobs? Just yesterday, I was at Cleveland State University, where its Veteran Student Success Program goes above and beyond in serving our Nation's veterans.

Unemployment among young Americans is especially acute and disproportionately affects young veterans, and that is an outrage. Today, the unem-

ployment rate for returning servicemembers between 20 and 24 is 27 percent—almost 3 times the national unemployment average. That means more than one in four veterans can't find a job to support his or her family, easing the transition to civilian life. When our economy needs their skills, when veterans can get the job done, too often veterans are turned away. Cleveland State University has a Project SERV Program to ensure servicemembers who return home and into the classroom receive the educational benefits they earned and deserve. Imagine the difficulty for someone 25 years old, who has done two combat tours in Iraq, who comes back to Cleveland or to Philadelphia or anywhere else in this country and tries to integrate into a classroom of 18- and 19-year-olds who have seen nothing like the 25-year-old who has been in combat in Iraq or Afghanistan.

This Project SERV at Cleveland State has been groundbreaking and is one of the few in the country—and now at Youngstown State University. What they are doing is establishing veteran support programs at colleges and universities. It started as an idea at a community roundtable I convened at Cleveland State a few years ago. It became law in the last Congress, and we have ensured its funding.

Yesterday, I met with Clarence Rowe, a staff sergeant in the Marine Corps, who is using the veterans resources at CSU to translate his military skills to the needs of the civilian job market. But as much as CSU and other universities do to assist our veterans, high unemployment continues to hurt all Americans. Too often, people such as Staff Sergeant Rowe, who has put years into serving his country, come back and, even with developing their job skills in school, they simply can't find jobs.

Education, workforce investment, and EDA have long been sound Federal investments that have helped to create jobs and strengthen our economy. It is a shame Republicans have yet again placed a roadblock on the pathway toward a strong and more prosperous middle class. We can do better than that.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise tonight to speak about our policy in Afghanistan. We know the President is about to announce a major decision on the policy. As the President determines the degree and scope of the drawdown in Afghanistan, there will be a lot of debate, about troop levels, principally. But while this is an important discussion, we need to step back and com-

prehensively focus on overall U.S. strategic interests in the region.

Over the course of my time in the Senate, some 4½ years now, I have participated in more than 20 Foreign Relations Committee hearings on Afghanistan and Pakistan. This week we will hear from Secretary Clinton on the U.S. policy on both Afghanistan and Pakistan. I personally chaired four hearings on U.S. policy in the region. I have traveled to Afghanistan and Pakistan on two occasions, and met with our military and civilian leadership as well as senior government officials in both countries. I have spoken repeatedly on the Senate floor about the importance of accountability of U.S. military and civilian programs.

When it comes to matters of war, the Senate has a special responsibility to ask questions and to hold the executive branch accountable no matter what party is in the White House. I have taken this responsibility very seriously and have repeatedly questioned and examined U.S. policy in south Asia.

There has been substantial progress in Afghanistan. On the battlefield, the United States coalition and Afghan forces have rolled back advances made by the Taliban. We have made measurable, albeit fragile, gains on security in key provinces of the country. Al-Qaida, operating from Pakistan, has been significantly degraded.

There has also been measurable progress in the education and health fields. Only 900,000 boys and no girls attended school under the Taliban. Today more than 6 million children are in school and a third of them are girls. In the field of health, more than 85 percent of Afghans now have access to at least some form of health care, up from 9 percent in the year 2002.

These gains have not come without immeasurable sacrifice on the part of our Armed Forces and of course their families. In Pennsylvania we have lost 30 servicemembers killed in action in Operation Enduring Freedom since 2001. To date, 461 have been wounded, some of them grievously wounded.

In Iraq, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania lost 197 servicemembers killed in action and 1,233 were wounded. These courageous men and women gave what many years ago Lincoln called “the last full measure of devotion” to their country. We owe them a debt of gratitude. We owe the same debt of gratitude to their families and to all veterans and their families returning from the battlefield.

After this exhaustive review, and based upon measurable gains in Afghanistan, I believe the United States can shift from a strategy of counterinsurgency toward an increased focus on counterterrorism. It is time for the United States to lighten its footprint in the country. It is also a time to accelerate the shift in responsibility to Afghan forces and for a drawdown of a significant number of United States troops from Afghanistan. The capabilities of both al-Qaida and the Taliban have been severely degraded.