

Here is what happened a few years ago. Here is what is happening now in the West. We ought to be doing something about it. Two years ago, there was a fire out there, 200,000 acres right in the same area. We rehabbed it. We grassed it, and the BLM said you cannot graze it for a couple of years now. Cattle might damage it.

Then there was another fire last year, 60,000 acres right beside it. We rehabbed it. We seeded it. You cannot graze it. At least that is what the scientists say. That is not what those who have lived out there for a hundred years say. We left it alone and the fuel built up.

Then we had someone sue us to protect the sage grouse habitat and the slickspot peppergrass, and a judge ruled. So we stopped grazing on half of that area, and the fuel built up.

Now, we are in a fire scenario, with temperatures in the West that we have never seen. So we had 3 weeks of 100-degree temperatures in the Boise Valley, and the dewpoint dropped to nearly zero. You know the rest of the story because I told you that story.

An unprecedented fuel buildup because a judge, and what I now call ecoterrorists, are destroying the landscape by not allowing reasonably managed, multiple-use approaches to our management. That is why the fire destroyed what it destroyed.

An unprecedented fuel loading is on the grasslands of our country. Now, because it is a little hotter, it is a little further into the summer, our timberlands are starting to burn. They, too, are loaded with fuel, and they will burn at unprecedented rates as they did last year and the year before and the year before that.

Here we are spending billions of dollars and destroying millions of acres of wildlife, watershed, wildlife habitat, all of those things combined. Our courts are saying: Get the people off the land, get the livestock off the land, rule in the favor of single-use management, here, there, and everywhere, tying the hands of our managers at the BLM and the Forest Service level, denying them the right to use their knowledge, use their scientific understanding for reasonable flexibility in the management we so desperately need.

That is the story of the Murphy Complex; that is the story of nearly 700,000 acres of total destruction; \$6.6 million, and by the time we are done rehabilitating it, it could go to nearly \$8 million.

Is there something we can do about it? Well, there will be interest groups who will rush back here, and in the name of the environment say do nothing—in the name of the environment.

Please, let us do something. Because the habitat the judge and the ecoactivists argued for to save the sage grouse and the slickspot peppergrass is no longer there. The enemy, some were the cattle that were grazing, they are no longer the enemy. The fire has become the enemy and that which they who ruled sought to save is now gone.

That story that I have related to you, whether it is played out in the Murphy Complex in Idaho and Nevada, or whether it is in Northern California, or whether it was in the Tahoe Basin this year, or whether it is in Eastern Oregon, or whether it is in the mountains of Idaho, will be played out and millions of acres will burn and billions of dollars will be spent and homes will be destroyed and we will say: Gee, I think we got a problem.

Congress will fail to respond and act to give our managers the flexibility, and we will continue to allow judges in the Ninth Circuit and environmental interests to game us and create these single, unique special kinds of management units that are impossible in any way to manage.

I wanted to relate to you this story. The State BLM director, our Governor, myself, and my colleague, Mike Crapo, flew over this devastation. In the terms of a cowboy who has lived out there all his life and his father before him and his father before him:

Senator, you ain't never seen anything like this one.

And, boy, we have not. The great tragedy is, more will come, and more is burning now. Several fires are burning in Idaho. We are already nearly over a million acres in my State alone. Yet our hands are tied by a bureaucracy that is strangled by court decision after court decision because Congress will not act in the name of the environment.

We have been scared into environmentalism instead of good and reasonable management. We are allowing our courts and our activist organizations to create the wildfire which has become a budget inferno.

So the reason I give this speech now is because we have entered the fire season. August is our fire season. September is our fire season. My guess is I will be returning as one of the members of the Appropriations Committee and the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee saying: Please, my colleagues, could we have a couple billion more dollars to fight these fires? Because we are burning up out there, and there is not much we seem to be able to do about it because we have decided to allow public land management to be turned over to the activists and the judges instead of the professionals.

Idaho burns tonight. Montana burns tonight. Nevada burns tonight, California, parts of Oregon, parts of Utah. I think it is important you hear this story and try to begin to understand that when we talk about balance and flexibility, you help us get there so we do not have to spend our budget in a useless and irresponsible way.

TRIBUTE TO ELIZABETH S. RUNNER

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to honor a respected Kentuckian, Mrs. Elizabeth S. Runner. On August 25, Mrs. Runner will turn 100 years old.

Mrs. Runner was born in Arkansas and moved to Warren County, KY, when she was just an infant. Her early years were not without struggle. She lost her father at the age of five, and her mother died during the flu epidemic that swept across the country in the early part of the last century. She was raised by her maternal grandmother.

At an early age, Mrs. Runner recognized the importance of a good education, and she pursued her passion for teaching. In 1925, she began her teaching career at Indian Creek, a one-room school in northern Warren County. She later transferred to the Richlandville School, where she taught until 1965. Over the course of her 40-year teaching career, she touched the lives of many Kentucky schoolchildren and their families.

In addition to being a devoted teacher, Mrs. Runner is a wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. She married J. Elvis Runner on June 28, 1930, and they were happily married until his passing in 1997. They raised two sons, Randall S. Runner and Phillip J. Runner. She has one granddaughter, Karen Elizabeth Runner, and two great-grandsons, Kory and Wren.

Mrs. Runner is a woman of faith and a founding member of the Rays Branch Church of Christ congregation. Kentuckians admire Mrs. Runner for her dedication to teaching, her family, her faith and her zest for life. I understand that Mrs. Runner's family and friends will gather on Sunday, August 26, to celebrate and honor her reaching the rare and marvelous milestone of a 100th birthday. I ask my colleagues to join me in sending Mrs. Runner well-wishes and congratulating her on her centenarian status.

AMERICA'S CRUMBLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise today in the wake of the terrible tragedy that began unfolding yesterday in the Twin Cities region of Minnesota.

As we all know by now, the bridge carrying Interstate 35W over the Mississippi River near downtown Minneapolis abruptly collapsed during yesterday evening's rush hour. At least 50 vehicles plunged 60 feet into the river. This morning, several people are confirmed dead, dozens of people are injured, and almost two dozen people remain missing. Sadly, first responders expect the death toll to rise as search and rescue missions continue today in earnest.

I would like to extend my thoughts and prayers to Senator COLEMAN, Senator KLOBUCHAR, and all those directly affected by this tragedy. The people of Connecticut can sympathize with the people of Minnesota at a time like this. Just over 24 years ago, a bridge carrying Interstate 95 over the Mianus River in Greenwich, CT, collapsed in the early afternoon. Four vehicles plunged into the river, three people

died, and three others sustained serious injuries. It remains the worst transportation disaster in my State's history.

Today, the National Transportation Safety Board will begin investigating the bridge collapse in Minnesota. While it is too early to conclude what exactly caused the collapse, we do know that a catastrophic structural failure of some sort occurred. We also know that this truss bridge was constructed in 1967 and—according to an interview on National Public Radio this morning—likely nearing the end of a 50-year operational lifetime.

The tragedy in Minnesota is the most recent example of our national infrastructure crumbling before our very eyes. Indeed, this is not a problem only affecting Minneapolis or Greenwich or—in the case of the recent steam pipe eruption—New York City. It is a problem affecting every State, county, city, and community between San Diego, CA, and Bangor, ME. For too long we have taken our infrastructure systems—our roads, bridges, mass transit systems, drinking water systems, wastewater systems, and public housing properties—for granted. For too long we have failed to invest adequately in their long-term sustainability. And today, we find ourselves in a precarious position concerning their future viability—a precarious position that is costing lives, endangering lives, and jeopardizing the high quality of life we have come to enjoy and expect as Americans.

According to the American Society of Civil Engineers in their seminal 2005 Infrastructure Report Card, the current condition of our Nation's major infrastructure systems earns a grade point average of D and jeopardizes the prosperity and quality of life of all Americans.

According to the Federal Highway Administration, 27.1 percent of all bridges are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete. The average age of bridges in our country is 40 years. Thirty-three percent of all urban and rural roads are in poor, mediocre or fair condition. Data from the Federal Transit Administration shows our mass transit systems are becoming increasingly unable to handle the growing demands of passengers in a safe and efficient manner. A significant percentage of our Nation's drinking water and wastewater systems are obsolete; the average age of these systems ranges in age from 50 years in smaller cities to 100 years in larger cities. Clearly, these statistics are alarming and they are not getting any better.

In their Infrastructure report Card, the American Society of Civil Engineers estimates that \$1.6 trillion is needed over a 5-year period to bring our Nation's infrastructure systems to a good condition.

Regrettably, our current infrastructure financing mechanisms, such as formula grants and earmarks, are not equipped by themselves to absorb this cost or meet fully these growing needs.

They largely do not address capacity-building infrastructure projects of regional or national significance; they largely do not encourage an appropriate pooling of Federal, State, local and private resources; and they largely do not provide transparency to ensure the optimal return on public resources.

Early yesterday afternoon, on, I joined with my colleague, Senator HAGEL, in introducing bipartisan legislation to establish a new method through which the Federal Government can finance more effectively large "capacity-building" infrastructure projects of substantial regional or national significance by using public and private capital. I will say to my colleagues that our legislation focuses on the long-term capacity and sustainability of infrastructure facilities just like the bridge that carried Interstate 35W over the Mississippi River.

Fixing our Nation's crumbling infrastructure is an issue that cannot be neglected or deferred any further. This demands our immediate attention and commitment in the Senate. The quality of life in our country hangs in the balance.

Again, I extend my thoughts and prayers to those in Minnesota.

ETHICS REFORM

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, following the tragic collapse of the 35W bridge in Minneapolis that took place yesterday, August 1, 2007, I returned to Minnesota this morning to learn all of the facts, and pledge the necessary Federal resources for the victims, the investigation, and the repair. By returning to Minnesota, I was, unfortunately, unable to be in Washington, DC, to vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the motion to concur in the House Amendment S. 1; and the motion to concur with the House Message to S. 1. Had the tragedy in my State not taken me back to Minnesota, I would have voted for the motion to invoke cloture as well as the underlying bill. In short, I would have voted to change the course in Washington.

When I arrived in Washington in January, my husband, daughter and I pulled up in our family Saturn, loaded with my husband's college dishes and a shower curtain that I found in the basement from 1980. But we brought a little more than dishes and shower curtains. We brought a commitment for change something the people of our State Democrats, Independents, and Republicans, from Worthington to Moorhead to Duluth to Rochester called for very clearly and loudly in November.

We also brought a Minnesota moral compass, grounded in a simple notion of Minnesota fairness: A notion that all people should be on equal footing in the halls of Congress.

But they can't be on equal footing when their elected representatives are selling their votes for trips to Scotland or have cash in the freezer. They can't

be on equal footing unless this new Congress delivers real, meaningful ethics reform.

That's why I came to Washington back in January and why I am delighted to see that the Senate passed a strong, bipartisan ethics reform package today.

Instead of maintaining business-as-usual, this ethics legislation will bring meaningful and robust reform in a number of critical areas.

Among other things, this legislation will bring about more transparency for lobbyist bundling and political campaign fund activity; greater transparency in earmarking; a strong lobbyist gift ban; meaningful limits on privately funded travel; strong revolving door restrictions; and expanded public disclosure of lobbyist activities.

Stated simply, these reforms are needed and they are needed now to restore the American public's faith in the integrity of their government as well as their elected representatives.

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of what's at stake.

Ethics is woven into the very fabric of how our government does business. And ethics reform goes to the very heart of our democracy, to the public trust and respect that's essential to the health of our constitutional system.

Recent scandals have cast a shadow over the legitimacy of the laws and policies that come out of Washington. The American public's receding faith in the integrity of our legislative process means that ethics reform is now central to every public issue that we will consider—whether it's energy policy, or health care reform, tax policy, or even homeland security.

The ability of Congress to deal credibly and forthrightly with these other issues depends on reforming our own ethical rules.

The long-term challenges that we face in this country are enormous. They include high energy prices and a growing dependence on foreign oil; health care costs that have spiraled out of control; global warming that threatens the future of our environment and our economy; a mounting national debt; and a growing middle class squeeze.

I believe that there are solutions to these challenges. We can achieve energy independence by investing smart and having some guts to take on the oil companies. We can get this country back on the right fiscal track, and move forward to more affordable health care. We can deliver much-needed and long overdue relief to the middle class. These are the things that the people of Minnesota sent me to Washington to fight for.

The people of Minnesota also sent me here because they have not yet seen the bold change of direction that we need to make these solutions happen. Instead, they have seen a Washington where the rules are tilted against them and where the interests of well-connected lobbyists come at the expense of the interests of the middle class.