

committee process to work, this bill has not been subject to the rigorous analysis and debate that the legislative process should require to avoid unintended consequences and poor decision-making. This process should be permitted to take place before legislation of this magnitude is sent to the full Senate. That is the committee's role and it is an important one.

If the full Senate were to routinely bypass the Finance Committee and consider major Medicare bills like this one that have not been processed by the members of the committee, then nothing would prevent the Senate from legislating on other Medicare and Medicaid issues without the benefit of hearings or committee action. Occasionally, the committee does process extensions of current law and smaller, generally technical bills through a more informal committee process, but it is a committee process nonetheless. If the committee is routinely bypassed entirely and not allowed to perform its vital role in the legislative process, it would be almost impossible to cope with the number and assortment of Medicare, Medicaid, and other issues that would come directly to the Senate floor in bills like S. 3656. To avoid that result is why the Senate has committees in the first place.

Just an initial review of this legislation today produces more questions than answers and many obvious and serious concerns. It is disappointing that some of the important provisions in this bill, like the rural health center provisions and IME policy, are packaged into a bill that has not been presented in a timely way or brought before the committee for appropriate consideration, debate, and amendment. Just a quick review of this bill today quickly reveals, in any case, that both in terms of process and policy, this bill does not sufficiently achieve a balance I think is necessary, and I must, on behalf of myself and other members of the committee, object to discharging S. 3656 from committee for consideration by the full Senate.

NUCLEAR POWER

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I don't want to repeat what has already been said by Senator VOINOVICH recently, but I do want to explain why I am cosponsoring legislation designed to tackle in a comprehensive way the biggest issue still outstanding in our efforts to revitalize nuclear power for this Nation, that being how we handle the waste.

I also want to talk about the retirement of the ranking member of the Senate Energy Committee, Senator PETE DOMENICI, who I will so deeply miss in the future.

Concerning the nuclear bill, I am cosponsoring the U.S. Nuclear Fuel Management Corporation Establishment Act that has been crafted by Senator VOINOVICH, with Senator SESSIONS and a number of other Senators, and I have

already cosponsored the SMART Act, which was crafted by the ranking member of the Energy Committee, Senator DOMENICI, and cosponsored by Senator SESSIONS and others, since the two bills work together to set up the policy and the management structure to improve how we handle the waste that nuclear powerplants generate.

While it is obviously too late in this session of Congress for either bill to advance, I want to say that I am certainly intending to help reintroduce both bills next year and in working next session to merge them into a comprehensive plan to recycle and then properly store the remaining waste that results from nuclear power production.

I am interested in working on these bills because I care about reducing greenhouse gases. And nuclear power is the best proven technology to produce power for this country without producing any carbon emissions. For anyone serious about tackling carbon emissions, finding a way to grow the next generation of nuclear power is vital.

Today nuclear energy provides about 20 percent of the Nation's electricity. As Senator VOINOVICH may have mentioned those 104 operating powerplants save America from producing about 681 million metric tons a year of carbon dioxide. If we are going to deal with global warming, we must find a way not just to keep nuclear power going, but also growing to help meet this Nation's growing thirst for electricity.

I was in France in late June and toured the French nuclear waste recycling facilities at LaHague. Recycling allows you to gain twice as much nuclear power from a given amount of uranium ore. More importantly, it cuts substantially the amount and the half-life, and in some cases, the toxicity of the waste that you later have to store. That is important for the environment.

In these two bills, the Nuclear Fuel Management Corp. will set up a Government corporation to take authority to manage spent nuclear fuel and provide both interim storage, the development of geologic repositories, such as the Yucca Mountain facility currently under consideration, and also to handle the construction and operation of any reprocessing and fuel fabrication facilities.

The SMART bill is designed to further the process of siting and advancing the construction of up to two reprocessing plants, since it would help to encourage cities in this country to welcome such plants. These bills, perhaps pared with one introduced last year to remove some potential regulatory hurdles to construction and opening of a Yucca Mountain repository, would effectively amount to a comprehensive solution to the waste issue. They would be the final pieces to the puzzle. That is the case because of the efforts of Senator PETE DOMENICI.

PETE DOMENICI

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, at the risk of embarrassing him, I want to take a moment to say how vital Senator DOMENICI has been in solving most of the nuclear puzzle. He really led the rebirth of the nuclear industry and I want to say how much I will miss him since he has been a prime mover in the effort to bring about a new nuclear age in this country.

As most of you know Senator DOMENICI has served 36 years in the Senate. But some of you may not know that he gave up a promising career in baseball to become a public servant. He started playing when he was 10, eventually pitching for a minor league team called the Albuquerque Dukes. But he left baseball to become a math and science teacher at Garfield Junior High in his native State of New Mexico, later went onto law school and ran for the U.S. Senate in 1972. And he's been here ever since.

About a dozen years ago the Senator realized that this Nation desperately needed a new source of electricity. He realized that there are higher uses for high-priced natural gas than to burn it for power generation, and that until carbon capture and storage can be perfected and widely practiced that the expansion of coal-fired power might have environmental drawbacks. So he crafted the forerunner of policies that today make up the Nuclear Power 2010 program, which is designed to have the Government partner with industry to approve the design and speed the licensing of the next generation of power plants that absolutely preclude the type of radiation accident that happened three decades ago at Three Mile Island.

He has been the sponsor of the loan guarantees, the architect of reauthorizing a responsible liability program and the person most responsible for harnessing the research capacities of America to breathe life into the research and nuclear construction sectors. One news outlet called him "the nuclear renaissance man." And he is recognized by all as the driving force behind the industry's resurgence.

But he has done so much more. His work on the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and on last year's Energy Independence and Security Act were landmarks in bipartisan legislating. He helped renewable and alternative energy, from wind and solar to biomass, and especially biofuels to develop, helping create Clean Renewable Energy Bonds to pay for the construction of renewable energy plants. During the bills he refereed more policy disputes and generated more compromises than I have time to mention.

But he also was the sponsor of so much other landmark legislation during his storied career. One bill finally passed the Senate earlier this week to require parity for mental health treatment benefits. As Senate budget chairman, he helped set up the Nation's budgeting system, which was still