

ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2012

SPEECH OF

HON. DAVID N. CICILLINE

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 8, 2011

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2354) making appropriations for energy and water development and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2012, and for other purposes:

Mr. CICILLINE. Mr. Chair, I submit these remarks in opposition to provisions in Title V of the Energy and Water Appropriations measure (H.R. 2354) that would rescind unobligated High Speed Rail funds.

Indeed the recent storms and flooding that have ravaged the Mississippi and Missouri River Basins warrant the immediate attention and relief provided by Emergency Supplemental Funding in Title V. And as a representative from Rhode Island, a state that itself suffered and continues to recover from record level flooding in 2010, I wholeheartedly recognize the importance of this funding, which will enable the Corps of Engineers to repair the damage done by these natural disasters.

However, as Ranking Members DICKS and VISCLOSKEY noted in their views on the underlying bill, H.R. 2354, I too am disappointed by the decision to offset this important disaster relief funding by rescinding unobligated High Speed Rail funds. Time and again Congress has rightly responded to natural disasters with the emergency funding that facilitates recovery in our communities and reconstruction of critical infrastructure. As a Congress, we must respond to natural disasters with the resources it takes, and we must responsibly reduce the deficit. Yet, we must also make the necessary investments that will create jobs now and guarantee the future strength of our economy.

The fact that our Nation's investment in High Speed Rail remains a target for the budget chopping block is not just disappointing—it is a threat to our economy. We have to commit to paying down our debt. But, we must also commit to putting people back to work, supporting our infrastructure, and ensuring our Nation's ability to compete in the global economy. Some estimates say that each month we spend approximately \$8 billion in Afghanistan—just think about that. In just 2 months worth of spending in Afghanistan, we exceed our Nation's entire investment in High Speed Rail. Each year, taxpayers dole out \$4 billion in subsidies to big oil companies who continue to enjoy record profits, and yet here we are, stripping communities of critically important infrastructure dollars.

High Speed Rail is not some far-fetched fantasy, or a transportation solution that should be considered more of a luxury than a national priority. High Speed Rail is a reality. And while we hesitate to get on board, our competitor nations are charging further and further ahead of us. We've seen it in the headlines time and again. China now has the world's fastest conventional high-speed trains and longest network of tracks. Next year, just 4 years after beginning its High Speed Rail service, China will have more track than all of the world's high speed lines combined.

High Speed Rail creates construction jobs in the maintenance and operations jobs in the long term, and indirect jobs by growing access to greater labor pools and driving new economic development. High Speed Rail reduces congestion on our highways and skyways. These are key investments to ensure that America has a fast, safe, and efficient transportation network. And at a time when press reports as recently as this morning indicate states like Rhode Island are experiencing a rise in gas prices again, High Speed Rail provides a logical alternative to our oil addiction.

For the First Congressional District in Rhode Island, the provisions of Title V will strip away \$3 million in High Speed Rail funds. For the state as a whole, it is estimated this Title will rescind more than \$28 million in rail funding. This rescission occurs less than 2½ months after the initial announcement of the allocation to the Ocean State. Not only is Rhode Island battling high rates of unemployment—some of the highest in New England—and a sluggish economic recovery, we now have to battle against the uncertainty and unpredictability created by unwarranted rescissions such as the one before us now in Title V. All told, it is estimated that this rescission will result in the loss of hundreds of jobs in my state alone.

As a former Mayor, I know how detrimental this loss in High Speed Rail is for my district, the state of Rhode Island, the Northeast Corridor, and the Nation as a whole. For the city of Providence and the state of Rhode Island, High Speed Rail is a critically important component in efforts to attract the private investment that will help sustain and grow our economy; rebuild the infrastructure that will allow for efficient and timely transport of goods, people, and ideas; and place people in well-paying middle class jobs. Cities and states all across this country are relying on this investment to help improve their economies, relieve transportation congestion, reduce our dependence on foreign oil, and compete in the global economy. Unfortunately, the offset contemplated in Title V will derail these efforts.

I strongly urge my colleagues to vote against this offset because we must not fall further behind as our competitors speed ahead in the global economy.

OPPOSING VOTER SUPPRESSION

HON. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 14, 2011

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, this August will mark the 46th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act. There are many who say there is no longer a need for the Voting Rights Act. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

It is true that we have made remarkable progress since 1965, including outlawing segregationist principles such as literacy tests, poll taxes and the grandfather clause. However, there is still much work to be done.

As we continue to observe during elections, minorities often face the uphill battle of misinformation distributed in black communities over how and when to vote, and purging of voter rolls and Election Day lines.

The Voting Rights Act was not and never will be about special rights. It is about equal

rights and ensuring that all Americans have the right to vote for their candidates of choice. The reality is that some people out there still want to suppress minority voting.

Recently, Texas passed legislation requiring picture identification in order to participate in the voting process. This systematic use of required voter identification cards will disproportionately impact voters that are elderly, minority, or disabled. Requiring individuals to produce picture identification will turn back the clock on voter rights and do little to prevent voter fraud.

Texas remains under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act due to a long history of discrimination of minority voters. I have strong concerns regarding the ability of minority, elderly and disabled voters to obtain a state identification card from the Texas Department of Public Safety. There is only one Department of Public Safety office in Dallas, and no offices in central Houston. For potential voters in Southwest Texas some would have to travel up to 200 miles to obtain a state identification card. While I am already working to ensure individuals have the transportation to obtain IDs, I believe many poor and minority voters simply will not have the means to obtain this required card. Putting undue burdens on a certain population of voters is not in line with requirements of the Voting Rights Act.

Our values, our freedom, and our democracy are based on the idea that every eligible American citizen has the right to vote. We cannot and must not give up until every American citizen has the access and opportunity to vote—regardless of their skin color, ethnicity, or language ability.

ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2012

SPEECH OF

HON. STEVE COHEN

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 8, 2011

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2354) making appropriations for energy and water development and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2012, and for other purposes:

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Chair, I am pleased to join with my colleagues on the House floor to oppose the Majority's efforts to cut funding for high-speed rail. As the Congressman from Memphis, a city that was damaged by historic floods this spring and a city in much need of disaster relief, I applaud the Majority for proposing more than one billion dollars in relief. However, I am disappointed that the Majority has decided to use high-speed rail funding to offset the cost.

I am disturbed by the Majority's decision to reach across jurisdictions and raid funding from the transportation sector, a sector in desperate need of investment. If an offset must be used then it should be from funds within the Energy and Water account. I also find it alarming that the Majority is cutting funds for high-speed rail, a program that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to fund relief for disasters that were exacerbated by climate

change. By cutting this funding, we are increasing our greenhouse gas emissions and only ensuring that we will need exponentially more disaster relief in the future.

The United States needs high-speed rail—it is vital to the mobility of our people and to our economic competitiveness. Creating a nationwide high-speed rail system would be a major economic catalyst that would create thousands of jobs, save billions in congestion reduction, curb our reliance on fossil fuels, reduce harmful pollution, and literally, save lives. Recognizing its enormous benefits, nations across the world are investing billions in high-speed rail and are creating systems that surpass existing U.S. rail service in speed, convenience, reliability, level of service, and comfort.

My Democratic colleagues and I understand the importance of high-speed rail and are fighting for vital funding. President Obama also understands the importance of investing in passenger rail and has set the ambitious goal of providing 80 percent of Americans with convenient access to a passenger rail system within 25 years. To reach this goal, the President has proposed \$53 billion over six years to fund the development of high-speed rail and other passenger rail programs as part of an integrated national strategy. I support the President's goal, an important goal that will never come to fruition if the Majority continues to cut high-speed rail funding.

Building a nationwide high-speed rail system is the 21st century equivalent of constructing the national interstate highway system, a project that has transformed the Nation. To create a nationwide rail system, the government is going to need to dramatically increase its rail sector spending. The discrepancy in historical Federal investment between highways, aviation, and intercity passenger rail is staggering. Between 1958 and 2008, we invested nearly \$1.3 trillion in our Nation's highways and over \$473 billion in aviation. Federal investment in passenger rail pales in comparison: we invested only \$53 billion in passenger rail from 1971 to 2008.

The American people recognize the absence of high-speed rail in the American transportation sector and are clamoring for it. Not a day goes by that I am not asked by a constituent about the prospects of bringing high-speed rail to Memphis. And Memphis is now closer than ever to joining the high-speed rail network, since a study I fought to authorize that is examining the feasibility of connecting Memphis to the South Central Corridor is nearing completion. But this important rail line will only be built if the Majority recognizes the obvious value of high-speed rail and transitions from eliminating all funding for high-speed rail development to fighting for additional funding.

Having suffered through historic floods in Memphis this spring, I understand as well as any other member of this body how critical one billion dollars in disaster relief is. But I implore the Majority not to offset disaster relief with high-speed rail funding. We should not be forced to choose between leveraging our Nation's prosperity and paying for essential disaster relief.

VOTER SUPPRESSION

HON. DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 14, 2011

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of our vibrant, participatory democracy and to speak out against voter suppression. I thank my friend and colleague from Ohio, Congresswoman MARCIA FUDGE, for organizing this Special Order to raise the warning flag on efforts now under way in many States to erode hard fought voter protections.

In the past generation, public officials of both parties have sought to make it easier for Americans to participate in the political process. With the expansion of Early Voting, absentee balloting, and Election Day Registration, the fundamental right to vote has become more accessible for millions of Americans—all while the integrity and administration of our electoral system has been improved.

That progress and our American tradition of “expanding the franchise” are now under attack. In state houses across the country, legislatures have enacted unnecessary and politically-motivated restrictions on the right to vote.

In my home State of Florida, Governor Rick Scott signed a law that imposes such high burdens on voter registration drives that the non-partisan League of Women Voters has been forced to end its registration efforts. The same law arbitrarily makes it more difficult for voters who moved, to change their addresses at the polls, a process that has proven effective in Florida for decades.

As part of a disturbing national trend, the Florida law also cuts the required hours for Early Voting by nearly half, reducing the Early Vote period from 14 days down to just 8 days. I know firsthand the value of early voting for Florida's large senior population, many of whom have difficulty in getting to the polls. Reducing the number of early voting days will have a major impact on their ability to participate in our democratic process.

Even though Early Voting allows busy working voters more opportunities to reach the polls, legislatures in Ohio, Wisconsin, and Georgia have also passed significant cuts to their Early Voting time periods.

An Early Vote reduction was also proposed in North Carolina, but—for now—has stalled because it would actually cost taxpayers more dollars to restrict Early Voting than to maintain the current system.

Strict photo identification laws, in which voters would have to show a specific type of government-issued photo ID before casting a ballot at the polls, were proposed in 36 States. Wisconsin, Texas, Kansas and other States passed these unnecessary laws even though 11 percent of eligible American voters—approximately 23 million people nationwide—lack the photo ID these laws demand. Moreover, the Brennan Center for Justice has demonstrated that the elderly, racial minorities, and young voters all disproportionately lack access to government-issued photo ID and will therefore face the highest burdens under newly enacted photo ID laws.

In Maine, the governor signed a bill ending Election Day Registration even though 60,000 Mainers registered to vote in 2008 alone. In New Hampshire, the legislature actually

pushed a bill that would redefine “domicile” in order to prevent students from voting.

Is this the kind of message to send to young people who want to participate in our democracy?

Restrictions on the right to vote burden all Americans, but they especially affect communities of color and other citizens who have historically experienced discrimination at the ballot box.

The nonpartisan group Project Vote has found that African-Americans and Latinos are more likely than white voters to register through a voter registration drive, meaning that fewer minority Americans will have the chance to register and vote in Florida because of these biased actions.

Despite these inequities, State legislatures around the country have never justified any rationale for these unnecessary changes except for the broadly debunked myth of voter fraud. These efforts to prevent eligible Americans from voting will do nothing to improve our electoral system, but they will reverse years of bipartisan progress in making the right to vote more accessible for every qualified citizen.

In the face of this assault on the right to vote, I am heartened by the commitment of my colleagues and our partners in the civil rights community to preserve the right to vote, knock down unnecessary barriers to the franchise, and continue to work for the inclusions of all eligible Americans in our political process.

ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2012

SPEECH OF

HON. MIKE MCINTYRE

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 8, 2011

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2354) making appropriations for energy and water development and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2012, and for other purposes:

Mr. MCINTYRE. Mr. Chair, I rise today in opposition of the Broun amendment to the fiscal year 2012 Energy and Water Appropriations bill that would transfer \$250,000 from the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission to the Budget Reduction Account. At a time of high unemployment and slow growth, the last thing Congress should be doing is killing engines for job creation.

Commissions similar to the Southeast Crescent Regional are a proven tool to help bring vital economic development to some of the poorest and most underserved parts of the country. Even before the financial crisis, many regions in the Southeast Crescent were suffering from job loss, generational problems of poverty and low economic development. Many of the counties in the Southeast Crescent, including those in states like Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida suffer from a high rate of poverty, below average income, and chronic unemployment. Since the economic recession, these rates have only gotten worse.

The Southeastern Crescent Regional Commission is based on the successful models of