



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 112th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 158

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28, 2012

No. 51

House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. HARPER).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 28, 2012.

I hereby appoint the Honorable GREGG HARPER to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

JOHN A. BOEHNER,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 17, 2012, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes each, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

THE TIME TO REBUILD AMERICA IS NOW

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. HIGGINS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Speaker, as our Nation winds down from its military engagements overseas, it's time for America to do some nation-building here at home.

A \$1.2 trillion investment in rebuilding American roads, bridges, transit, and water systems would create 27 million jobs over 5 years. In the first year alone, the economy would add 5.2 million new jobs and grow by over \$400 bil-

lion. In the second year, unemployment would be reduced to 5.6 percent. These are among the findings of the New America Foundation report, "The Way Forward."

Nearly every expert agrees that America's infrastructure is broken and is in need of immediate repair and replacement. The American Society of Civil Engineers gave America a D grade for infrastructure quality. It is estimated that \$2.2 trillion is needed to bring our Nation's infrastructure to good repair. The World Economic Forum ranks the United States 23rd in infrastructure quality. Transportation for America reports that there are 69,000 structurally deficient bridges nationwide, including 2,000 in New York and 99 in western New York alone.

In fact, every second of every day, seven cars drive on a bridge that is structurally deficient. Dangerous road conditions were a significant factor in one-third of all traffic fatalities last year, and Americans spent 4.2 billion hours stuck in traffic due to congestion, costing \$78 billion, or \$710 for every American motorist.

The 1987 collapse of the Schoharie Creek Bridge in New York killing 10 people and the 2007 collapse of the Minneapolis bridge killing 13 people are tragic reminders of the human costs associated with deteriorating infrastructure.

The economic costs are staggering, too. The United States Chamber of Commerce says that the Nation will lose \$336 billion in economic growth in the next 5 years due to inadequate infrastructure. One local example: in January, the New York State Department of Transportation closed a crucial bridge in Springville, New York, due to concerns about its safety, and the weeks-long closure was devastating to local businesses.

The time to rebuild America is now. Actually, it's right now. The cost of borrowing money is at a historic low

rate. The interest rates on 5-year debt is less than 1 percent. The Treasury Department is considering negative interest rates, meaning that investors will actually pay the Federal Government to buy United States debt.

The question is not whether to undertake this work. Public infrastructure is a public responsibility. The question is when to undertake this work. The cost acceleration of delaying road and bridge repair increases by 500 percent after only 2 years. Put simply, a \$1 million road repair project today not undertaken will cost \$5 million in 2014; a \$5 million bridge repair project will cost \$25 million in 2014. What's more, a 5-year \$1.2 trillion program would create such robust economic activity that it would generate an additional \$600 billion in Federal tax revenues, that is to say that our country would be purchasing \$1.2 trillion in investment for infrastructure for nearly half off.

The United States has spent \$76 billion rebuilding the infrastructure of Afghanistan, a population of 30 million people, and \$63 billion rebuilding Iraq, a population of 27 million people. Both of these nation-building efforts were deficit financed. And as they took money out of the American economy, they actually undermined American economic growth and employment.

And for America, a population of over 300 million, the House is considering a 5-year \$260 billion transportation bill, or \$52 billion each year for the next 5 years, on average. That's less in any given year than we spent in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

Rebuilding our Nation's roads and bridges will support private sector American businesses. Construction trade jobs average approximately \$70,000 a year, and these jobs can't be outsourced to China or Mexico.

HELMETS TO HARDHATS

Mr. HIGGINS. I began this morning by talking about the wars in Iraq and

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Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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Afghanistan. Let me now say something about our returning veterans.

The unemployment rate for returning veterans under the age of 24 is an unacceptably high rate of 38 percent. A good and grateful Nation owes it to these veterans to ensure that they return home to economic opportunity.

The Department of Defense sponsored a program back in 2002 called Helmets to Hardhats to accelerate apprenticeship training and job placement for these returning veterans. Helmets to Hardhats is now a nonprofit organization working with 15 construction trades and over 80,000 American businesses.

Mr. Speaker, it is the right time to make a robust investment to repair our outdated and failing infrastructure. There's a lot of work to be done, and a lot of Americans need to be put to work.

BULLYING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. COBLE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. COBLE. Mr. Speaker, last Saturday evening, I was watching the weekly Fox television program entitled "Huckabee." Bullying was the featured issue.

Mr. Speaker, bullying has become a severely significant issue in some schools across our country.

Bullies, with limited exception, select their targets or victims in this manner: the victims are smaller in physical stature than are the bullies and are usually younger in years.

The victims of bullying become depressed and embarrassed, resulting in physical and emotional damage. One young lad became so distraught that he died by his own hand. Yes, he took his own life because of the damage that bullying had inflicted upon him.

The "Huckabee" program, in addition to having interviewed a bullying victim and his family, featured as well the director of the recently released movie entitled "Bully." I urge you all to see this movie.

Mr. Speaker, I want to insist that bullies are punished at their schools by their parents and are prosecuted as juveniles if they are still minors.

We should cut no slack to bullies. They deserve no slack. If exposure could link the bullies to the aforementioned suicide, perhaps that should be pursued as well.

Mr. Speaker, this bullying plague must be resolved, but it will be resolved only when the bullies receive the punishment they deserve.

PUERTO RICO SNAP RESTORATION ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. PIERLUISI) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Speaker, today I'm introducing the Puerto Rico SNAP Restoration Act.

In 1971, Congress enacted legislation to partially include Puerto Rico in what is today called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, and what was then called the Food Stamp program.

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Implementation of the Food Stamp program in Puerto Rico began in 1974. In 1977, Congress amended Federal law to fully include Puerto Rico in the Food Stamp program so that rules governing eligibility and benefits applied no differently on the island than they did in the 50 States. Four years later, however, Congress exercised its authority under the Territory Clause and removed Puerto Rico from the Food Stamp program, electing to provide the island government with an annual block grant instead. Since 1982, Puerto Rico has used this block grant to administer its Nutrition Assistance Program, which differs from SNAP in a number of material respects.

The bill I'm introducing today, which I will seek to include in the 2012 farm bill, would reinstate the SNAP program in Puerto Rico in place of the block grant.

If this bill is enacted into law, Puerto Rico would join the 50 States, the District of Columbia and two U.S. territories—Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands—as jurisdictions fully participating in SNAP. My decision to file legislation converting Puerto Rico back to SNAP was made after carefully weighing the benefits and costs associated with this conversion. I relied primarily upon an in-depth study prepared by the USDA which evaluated the feasibility and impact of reinstating SNAP in Puerto Rico. On this subject, as with other important issues that I'm tackling, I have adhered to the principle that it is essential to build a strong evidentiary record prior to taking legislative action.

The USDA report is comprehensive and raises a number of important policy questions, but its bottom-line message for Puerto Rico is crystal clear, namely, while there are some trade-offs associated with the conversion to SNAP, the benefits of conversion far outweigh the costs.

Let me be more specific. Applying certain assumptions, the USDA study found that conversion would increase the number of households that receive nutrition assistance in Puerto Rico by over 15 percent. An additional 85,000 households would become eligible for assistance under SNAP. Moreover, restoring SNAP would raise the average monthly benefit by participating households by nearly 10 percent. And instituting equal treatment for Puerto Rico under SNAP would mean an additional \$457 million in Federal spending for the island each year, over 90 percent of which would take the form of additional benefits.

These numbers reveal a fundamental truth: because Congress removed Puerto Rico from SNAP 20 years ago, hun-

dreds of thousands of needy children, families, and seniors on the island have received no nutrition assistance at all or have received far fewer benefits than they would have received if they lived in the 50 States or even in the neighboring Virgin Islands.

Accordingly, Puerto Rico's exclusion from this program serves as yet another example of how the American citizens I represent, especially my most vulnerable constituents, are treated unequally because of the island's territory status.

Whether I'm fighting to convert Puerto Rico back to SNAP or to increase the island's annual block grant, I strongly believe this is a fight worth making. By ensuring that the neediest of my constituents can afford a healthy diet, we enable them to lead a dignified and independent life, which in the long run helps reduce health care costs and takes pressure off other safety net programs.

THE RYAN BUDGET AND THE INDIVIDUAL MANDATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. NUNNELEE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. NUNNELEE. Mr. Speaker, this is an important week for the future of our Republic. In this Capitol, we are debating and voting on budgets, laying out our visions for how we should handle the spending, taxing, and debt issues facing America in the coming years. Across the street at the Supreme Court, they're debating what, if any, limits can be placed on the Federal Government's power to regulate under the Commerce Clause of our Constitution.

But, really, we're talking about the same thing: Do we still live under a Federal Government of limited and enumerated powers? Do we believe that the source of our government begins in "We the people"? Do we believe in liberty? Do we trust people to make their own decisions about their own lives without reliance on, or subservience to, an all-knowing and all-powerful central government in Washington? Are there limits on what Washington can demand of the citizens that it's supposed to be serving? Republicans believe that the answer to these questions is a resounding "yes."

The budget put forth by Chairman RYAN and the Budget Committee shows that it is possible for this Congress to offer solutions to the challenges of the modern world that are rooted in limited government, individual freedom, and the Constitution. It is our responsibility to govern and to offer the people an alternative to the do-nothing attitude of the Senate Democrat leadership or the business-as-usual, tax-spend-and-borrow budget offered by the President.

The arguments being made by the plaintiffs against the individual mandate are that the Constitution is not