

he went from 200 pounds to 120 pounds. After 7 years of confinement, on February 12, 1973, 39 years ago this week, Colonel SAM JOHNSON was finally released.

After his release, Colonel JOHNSON continued to serve in the United States Air Force for a total of 29 years. While he was in that POW camp, back home in Texas, his wife, Shirley, knew he'd been shot down, but she didn't know what had happened to him for 2 years—whether he was alive, dead, or missing in action.

After he left the United States Air Force, he served in the State house in Texas. He had his own business, and then in 1991, he came to the House of Representatives, where he continues to serve with distinction and to represent the folks from Texas.

SAM JOHNSON returned to America with honor. He is a special breed. He is the American breed. He is that special warrior, even during the time he was a captive warrior, who never forsook his duty and never forsook his honor.

Colonel SAM and other Vietnam veterans were not only treated badly in Vietnam, but many who returned were treated poorly by America. These vets had no welcome home parades. They were cursed and they were spit upon. America did not really appreciate those old warhorses from Vietnam.

So, to Colonel SAM and all who served in Vietnam, welcome home, welcome home, welcome home.

Some served and returned. Some served and did not return. Some served with the wounds of war.

So, to Colonel SAM JOHNSON, we appreciate your service because the worst casualty of war is to be forgotten.

And that's just the way it is.

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. The fancy new software at use in our congressional offices gives us the ability to see all of the constituent contacts, all of their questions, complaints, and concerns by category.

I wonder if anyone in Congress has received any complaints about the Safe Routes to School program. I'll bet not. So why is the Republican transportation bill eliminating Safe Routes to School, creating an "unsafe route to school"?

This is a wildly popular program, costing a fraction of a percent of the transportation budget, and it has had a huge impact nationally on our children because it deals with real consequences for them.

□ 1020

A generation ago, 40 or 50 percent of children were able to get to school on their own. Now only 13 percent can. It's no wonder that childhood obesity has exploded over the same period of time,

with one in three of our children now overweight or obese or seriously at risk. Asthma has gone up for children 74 percent over the last 5 years. There are real consequences for accidents. There were 23,000 5- to 15-year-olds injured, and more than 250 kids killed walking or biking in 2009.

Getting our children to school in the morning represents 10 to 14 percent of the entire American morning commute, 6.5 billion trips stretching 30 billion miles. Doesn't it make sense to do something about the congestion, the injuries, deaths, and the obesity? Absolutely.

Twenty years ago, as Portland's commissioner of public works, I started a program in my city to help teach kids how to get to school safely and to improve road and sidewalk conditions. Ten years ago, we started a national program, Safe Routes to School. Schools with these programs show a 20 percent to 200 percent increase in the number of kids walking or biking. According to a recent California study, these students are healthier, they do better in school, and there is a 49 percent decrease in accident rates.

So why are my Republican friends advancing a transportation bill attacking Safe Routes to School, stripping it out, making it an unsafe route to school? Well, it's a fitting metaphor for perhaps the worst transportation bill in history. I think that may be one of the reasons they were afraid to even have a single hearing on the package that's coming to the floor this week.

They attacked the foundation of 20 years of balanced transportation reform. It shatters the 30-year partnership between transit and road interests that gave 80 percent to roads and 20 percent to a transit account, brokered by Ronald Reagan's administration. It undercuts the role of local governments and metropolitan areas to shape and control their own destiny, leaving them to the tender mercy of bureaucrats in their State capitals.

But it's not just Safe Routes to School. They attack high-speed rail, bicycles, Amtrak. They attack the basic environmental and public participation protections that have been gutted that actually have been very important to make sure that we have good projects that aren't held up politically or in court.

Sadly, I am very disappointed. I have worked for years on a coalition of broad interests across the spectrum of highway, professional, environmental, labor, business groups toward a good transportation bill and a coalition that can work together for the badly needed transportation resources. This Republican bill splits away valuable allies and will make it almost impossible to get the resources we need in the future. And, of course, their bill is \$5 billion short for highways after taking all of these resources and stuffing them into the Highway Account.

This is, simply, the worst highway bill ever. It is the first we've seen that

has not been at least a semblance of bipartisanship and is something that's never been considered in committee. Too timid to do the job, it recklessly abandons the trust fund principle, raising the ire of budget hawks for abandoning "user pay". It guts the most popular programs that help stretch dollars and improve communities. And, as I say, it shatters the coalition that we need to deal with the future resources.

Mercifully, this theological statement, sloppy, incomplete, and ill-considered has no chance of ever being enacted into law; but it's important that the House reject it. There is no more powerful symbol of how bankrupt this proposal is than eliminating the wildly popular and effective Safe Routes to School. If for no other reason, reject this bill for our children.

IMPROVING THE TRANSPORTATION BILL

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

Mr. DOLD. Madam Speaker, one of the core functions of the government is to invest in infrastructure and transportation. This is not a Republican idea or a Democrat idea. It's an American one. At a time when people are so desperately looking for Washington to come together, this is an issue that we should and can work together on.

This week we're debating the transportation bill. While there are many great qualities about this bill, there is still a need—and I would argue a great need—to improve it. That's why I am pleased that there are literally hundreds of amendments to try to strengthen this bill.

I hail from the State of Illinois. Illinois is a donor State, which means that we are putting in more transportation funds than we are receiving back from the Federal Government. That is why I am concerned by the cuts facing our State. We stand to lose almost \$650 million. As one of the largest manufacturing hubs of the country, our region cannot afford to lose this critical funding. Our transportation funds help strengthen our local economy and keep jobs at home.

Let me be clear. There are some very good steps in this bill that I believe we all should be able to embrace. The bill provides long-term certainty to States when they're planning their transportation projects. We haven't had a transportation bill in a number of years, since 2005; and this would provide 5 years of stability. It includes numerous reforms that enable States to cut through red tape and speed up the completion of projects, many taking about 15 years today, which would be going down to 7 or 8 years in the future.

I'm pleased that the bill strengthens the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, which impacts places like Waukegan Harbor. Waukegan Harbor is a critical part of the Great Lakes harbor system

and helps bring jobs home to the 10th District, which so desperately needs them.

That being said, there are several aspects about this bill that need to be resolved. One of my major areas of concern is that of the environment. Madam Speaker, the bill would open a portion of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, also referred to as ANWR, to oil and gas drilling. For over 50 years, the development of ANWR has been debated greatly. We have an obligation to be good stewards of our national treasures and fiscally responsible in funding our Nation's infrastructure. However, including the Arctic refuge drilling provision will greatly complicate the transportation bill moving forward and make agreement with the Senate far more difficult. ANWR should be the last resort, not the first one.

I'm also concerned with the future sustainability of transit funding. In the Chicagoland region, we depend on mass transit to lessen the congestion on our roads and to get people to and from work. We do this far more efficiently with mass transit. Fifty percent more people would be on area highways and interstates if it were not for mass transit.

So think about that. For the people back there that have driven through Chicago, if we were to add an additional 50 percent on the already congested roads, it would make life far more difficult for moving goods and services around and for getting people to and from work. This is not what we need. Mass transit is a vital program and one that we need to preserve. We need to have the certainty out there for funding. In Illinois, our State will face a \$137 million shortfall each and every year if this bill is enacted as it stands right now. This is unacceptable.

With all this being said, I believe that we have much to do, and we can work together to build a transportation bill that gives States the ability to plan for the long term and complete projects faster. But we do not need to do so at the detriment of mass transit or the environment. So let's work together and make this a better bill that we can all be proud of and move our country forward.

□ 1030

CRISIS OF POVERTY IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEE of California. Madam Speaker, as a founder and cochair of the Congressional Out of Poverty Caucus, I rise again to sound the alarm about the crisis of poverty in America.

While many of us are encouraged by the recent improvements in the unemployment rate, which fell to 8.3 percent, the rate of unemployment continues to be unacceptably high, especially for communities of color. For African Americans, the unemployment

rate is 13.6 percent, and it's 10.5 percent for Latinos. The rate of unemployment for our youth is even more alarming, with over 23 percent of 16-19 year olds looking for a job. Without a job, Madam Speaker, how can we expect our youth, the future of this country, to develop the skills and experience they need to succeed and live out their American Dream.

Encouragingly, President Obama understands that we cannot speed up economic recovery without investments that create jobs. I was pleased to see in his 2013 budget proposal critical investments to create good jobs and job training programs for communities hardest hit by our struggling economy. By targeting economic assistance where it's most needed, the President's proposed budget goes a long way to level the playing field to give every American the opportunity to succeed.

There's a lot that my Republican colleagues can learn from the President's budget, especially this: that fighting poverty and reducing the deficit can be achieved together. But let me be clear. This budget is not perfect. There are cuts in this budget that would undermine some of the progress our economy is making. Cuts to safety net programs like the Community Services Block Grant, Low Income Heating Assistance, and affordable housing programs will hit already struggling families especially hard.

During these difficult times, we really do need to protect programs that are a lifeline for the most vulnerable. We need to increase funding for programs like SNAP and WIC which keep millions of American families out of poverty. But keeping people from suffering the worst effects of poverty is not enough to restore our economy. Even with the recent increases we have seen in job creation, long-term unemployment remains at record levels, with 5.5 million workers who have been out of work for 27 weeks or more. Until Republican leaders in the House can pass President Obama's American Jobs Act or put forth any kind of reasonable plan for job creation, we must ensure that the safety net is strong.

So, Madam Speaker, again I call for an immediate up-or-down vote on Congressman BOBBY SCOTT's and my bill, H.R. 589, which will give the millions of job seekers who continue to struggle to find a job just 14 more weeks of vital unemployment benefits. This would allow them to have just a little more time to find a good job and to support their family while our fragile economy continues to recover.

Also, Madam Speaker, this Congress has a lot of work to do. We are just a few days away from when unemployment benefits are set to expire for millions of Americans across the country. Low-income families were hardest hit during the recession, and they cannot afford another year of a Republican Congress that fails to focus on jobs, refuses to strengthen our middle class, and tries to end the Medicare guar-

antee for all of our seniors. It is incumbent upon this conference committee to ensure that the bridge is strong enough to deliver us all, even our most vulnerable, over these troubled waters.

Madam Speaker, let's put our Nation before our party. Americans really cannot wait, and neither should this Congress.

TRANSPORTATION EMPOWERMENT ACT

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

Mr. GRAVES of Georgia. Madam Speaker, we're hearing a lot about transportation this week in the form of the transportation reauthorization bill. That causes us to maybe reflect back. Why are we reauthorizing something, and where did it originate, and what is our plan forward?

In fact, this comes from decades and decades and decades ago, and it's a chance when we can say to ourselves: Are we on the right path? Is this the right path for this Congress and the future of our Nation?

I think back to the last election cycle when the American people said we want to see things done just a little bit different, and I want to talk about that just a little bit this morning because today, when it comes to transportation, all States pay 18.4 cents per gallon for every gallon of gas they purchase. They send that to the Federal Government, and the Federal Government is distributing that out across the country.

Now, a lot of people would say that comes back to our States, doesn't it? Well, in fact, it does not. There are 28 States in this Nation that send money to the Federal Government and don't get it all back, Georgia being one of them, along with many others throughout the country. We're referred to as the donor States.

So, in addition to these 28 States not getting back all of their money, there are all of these mandates that occur to each and every one of these States. So as we can imagine, these 28 States, they want to get back all of their money. In fact, Georgia sent a resolution to Congress, and I want to read a section of it here and then submit it for the RECORD, because the Georgia General Assembly said that this body, meaning the Georgia General Assembly, urges the Federal Government to cease the collection of motor fuel taxes in Georgia so that the State can collect and distribute the taxes without the delay caused by the Federal collection and disbursement.

So Georgia and many other States are asking for changes. They're asking for the Federal Government to do something just a little different, but yet we're entering into this debate about reauthorization when maybe we just need to rethink the program altogether.

In Georgia, \$800 million was not received by the State of Georgia. It was