

to shift toward relying more on renewable fuel, and it is working. Demand is down. Biofuel use is up. Consumers save money on fuel for their vehicles. Our percentage of imported oil has dropped by over 10 percent.

How do we continue on this path forward toward reducing oil use and dependence? I think there are three areas we can focus on. First, we need to enable further expansion of our renewable fuel industry, which is currently facing infrastructure and financing constraints. Second, we need to move forward the timeline for market penetration of electric vehicles. Finally, we need to make sure we use natural gas vehicles in as many applications as make sense based on that technology. Every barrel of oil that we are able to displace in the transportation sector and that we therefore do not need to consume makes our economy stronger.

Obviously, it also helps our personal pocketbooks. It makes us less available to the volatility of the current marketplace. This is not to say we should not keep drilling and that the Obama administration should not continue to move forward with its plans to bring even more supplies into the market. We lead the world in innovative exploration and production technology. It is helpful to our economy and our national security to increase domestic supply, and that is exactly what is happening.

But in the many debates we will have in the future over issues related to gasoline prices, we need to recognize the key issue very clearly is not lack of access to federally owned oil and gas resources. Our public lands contain many resources and uses that Americans value. We do not need to sacrifice science or balance the protection of these other resources and economic interests in order to have robust domestic production.

The long-term solution to the challenge of high and volatile oil prices is to continue to reduce our dependence on oil. This is a strategic vision that President George W. Bush, who had previously worked in the oil industry, clearly articulated in his State of the Union speech in 2006. We subsequently proved in Congress in 2007, the year after that State of the Union speech, that we have the ability to make significant changes in our energy consumption and that it is possible to mobilize a bipartisan consensus to do that. The bipartisan path the Senate embraced in 2007 is still the right approach today.

As part of whatever approach we take to energy and transportation in the weeks and months ahead, we need to be honest with our constituents about what works, and we need to keep moving in the direction that we began moving in with that 2007 bill. We need to allow the facts and not the myths to be our best guide.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Oregon.

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION ACT

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, I rise to address the surface transportation bill that is on the floor. It has been a mark of the challenges this body faces in deliberation that we have now been on this bill for 3 weeks, and we have not had a debate over transportation amendments. But hope does spring eternal.

In that spirit, I wished to come to the floor and share some thinking about the amendments that we should be debating and should be approving in this process. Certainly, the underlying Transportation bill is a great step toward our No. 1 goal of passing legislation that would create jobs, put people back to work in the hardest hit sectors of our economy.

Building and repairing our transportation infrastructure will create or save 2 million jobs nationwide, good-paying jobs that would provide a huge boost to our struggling construction industry, the families, to the workers, and to our economy. This infrastructure we would be building is a down-payment for the success of our future economy.

China is spending 10 percent of its GDP on infrastructure. They are preparing for a stronger economy in the future. Europe is spending 5 percent of their GDP, but in America we are spending only 2 percent. Indeed, it was not but a few months ago that our colleagues on the House side of Capitol Hill said we should cut transportation spending by 30 to 35 percent, which would devastate the infrastructure efforts that are underway, even within the existing 2 percent, the small amount we are spending.

Is it any wonder our communities are struggling to repair the bridges and roads we have, let alone to solve the challenges, the bottlenecks in the transportation lines that need to be addressed for the future. We have made a good start in committee on this bill, despite the paralysis on the floor of the Senate. We had elements of this bill go through four different committees and incorporate good ideas from both sides of the aisle in each of those committees and come to the floor in a bipartisan fashion.

I wish to share a couple other thoughts to build on this groundwork that came out of our committees, commonsense fixes, cutting redtape, and closing loopholes. The first amendment, No. 1653, is one I am sponsoring with my colleagues Senator TOOMEY and Senator BLUNT. Right now, farmers are exempt from certain Federal regulations when they transport their products in farm vehicles, as long as they are transporting these products inside their own State. But should they venture across State lines, even by just a short distance, then the Federal regulations are triggered. So we have farmers who are simply trying to get their products to market, to the local grain elevator, if you will, and they have to cross a State border and suddenly their

challenge becomes very complex indeed.

For instance, Oregon farmers who live just across the border from Idaho, in these cases, the best market might be the nearest processing facility just across the State line. These farmers are exactly the same as their counterparts elsewhere, except for one small fact, the processing facility is across the border. This arbitrary distinction can mean major differences in how these farmers and ranchers have to do business in the form of additional burdensome regulations, regulations such as vehicle inspections for every trip the vehicle makes, even if the farm vehicle is simply driving from the field to the barn or having to adhere to reporting requirements for things like hours of service rules, even though the farmer is just driving an hour down the road; or obtaining medical certifications meant for commercial truck drivers.

This amendment would simply make life a little easier and more logical for these farmers by exempting them from these regulations designed for interstate transport, not designed to intervene or interfere when a farmer is attempting to take his product to market. We have put limits on mileage and limits on purpose to make sure it serves the intended function—to get rid of that arbitrary boundary that creates a regulatory nightmare.

A second amendment is related to freight. The underlying bill has a freight program to improve the performance of the national freight network. That is a proposal that will help make desperately needed improvements. There are a few technical improvements that would further improve the bill; that is, to recognize that funding should be used in the most efficient and effective way to ensure that high-value goods are being moved quickly to market.

We often think of freight in terms of volume or tonnage. But when we start looking at the high-tech sector, we can have enormously high-value content such as that produced by the microchip industry in Oregon and the roads necessary to make sure that high-value freight gets to market, which drives a tremendous number of jobs. It is just as important to address as are the routes that involve high tonnage and volume.

Let's turn to a third issue, which is "Buy American." I salute my colleagues, SHERROD BROWN and BERNIE SANDERS, for working on these issues. We already recognize the principle that if we are paying to complete a public infrastructure project in America, it only makes sense for American businesses and workers to do as much of the work as possible.

Unfortunately, there are several loopholes that have undermined this basic premise in recent years. My amendment No. 1599 is an amendment that addresses one of these loopholes.

This summer, construction of a rail bridge in Alaska to a military base will

be undertaken by a Chinese company because the Federal Rail Administration, unlike the Federal Transit and Federal Highway Administration, doesn't have the "Buy American" provision. An American company was ready to build this bridge, but because of this loophole the contract went to a Chinese company using Chinese steel. Isn't it frustrating that the infrastructure to provide access to a military base involves jobs and the steel going across the Pacific Ocean?

Then I wanted to note that a related amendment led by Senator SHERROD BROWN, No. 1807, addresses another "Buy American" challenge. States have been using a project segmentation loophole to avoid putting Americans to work, to avoid the "Buy American" seal.

The Bay Bridge in California put in 12 separate projects so that Federal funds would only apply to a couple of those pieces. This allows the bulk of the bridge to be built—you guessed it—with Chinese steel, by Chinese workers. My amendment is modeled after a Republican amendment in the House Transportation bill, by Representative CRAVAACK of Minnesota, to close this loophole and ensure that the spirit of the law is upheld. These provisions were incorporated into the amendment led by Senator SHERROD BROWN.

I urge my colleagues to support these amendments to make these common-sense fixes to our transportation program. We must have debate on the amendments on the Senate floor. This room should not be empty. The conversation should not be quiet because transportation is at the heart of our economy.

We have a construction industry that is flat on its back. We have interest rates that are low. We have infrastructure that needs to be built. This is a win-win for our future economy and our current workers and our current economy.

Let's get to work. I ask my colleagues to continuously object to amendments being debated—for those listening in, the Senate has had a rule that any Senator can block an amendment. We have to get 100 percent of the Senators to agree to bring an amendment to the floor. The social contract that allows this to happen on a regular and orderly fashion in the past has been broken. So while families across this country look to us to put a transportation plan into place for our future economy and to put America back to work now, we are sitting here fiddling. Let's end the fiddling and do our work so America can do its work of rebuilding our highway infrastructure.

Madam President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

TO APPLY THE COUNTERVAILING DUTY PROVISIONS OF THE TARIFF ACT OF 1930 TO NONMARKET ECONOMY COUNTRIES

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate having received H.R. 4105, the text of which is identical to S. 2153, the Senate proceeds to the consideration of H.R. 4105, the bill is considered read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table.

MOVING AHEAD FOR PROGRESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY ACT

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 1813, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1813) to reauthorize Federal-aid highway and highway safety construction programs, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Reid amendment No. 1761, of a perfecting nature.

Reid amendment No. 1762 (to amendment No. 1761), to change the enactment date.

Reid motion to recommit the bill to the Committee on Environment and Public Works, with instructions, Reid amendment No. 1763, to change the enactment date.

Reid amendment No. 1764 (to (the instructions) amendment No. 1763), of a perfecting nature.

Reid amendment No. 1765 (to amendment No. 1764), of a perfecting nature.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I thought I would use this opportunity to inform our colleagues and anyone following this transportation debate as to where we are.

Yesterday, we had an opportunity to stop the filibuster and get right to our bill and get it done and protect 1.8 million jobs and create another 1 million. We didn't do that—pretty much on a party line vote. The filibuster continues.

The hopeful sign we had was right before the vote when the Republican leader said he was open to reaching an agreement. I was hopeful that agreement would not contain extraneous votes. I don't think that is going to happen. I think we are going to face extraneous votes—to repeal Clean Air Act rules, to open our States to drilling that rely on fishing and tourism and recreation when we know the oil companies have millions of acres they can drill on without going to these

areas that are so essential to our economic future just as they are to our environmental future. It looks as though we are going to face that and a vote probably on the Keystone XL Pipeline.

Again, I am very sad we could not come together when we have a bill that got an 85-to-11 vote to proceed to it. We still have to face a filibuster and still we had to lose two votes to cut off debate. But the Senate, being the Senate, this is it.

So now we have to vote. The two leaders can agree. I hope they can work together to achieve an agreement whereby we would have votes on these extraneous matters, and, hopefully, we would not have a prolonged debate on them because this is a highway bill. Thousands and thousands of businesses are waiting for us to act. By March 31, if we don't act, everything stops. In your State and mine all these highway projects will shut down with no Federal contribution at all, which is most of them.

I am hopeful. I cannot report to the Senate that we have an agreement now, but I hope we will have one at some point today. Once we do have that, we have a path forward; and if we work together in goodwill, we can get this done.

Frankly, I don't think we have a choice but to get it done. Everything, as I said, expires March 31. Here it is March 7 and we have a few days left before this whole thing blows up, and we will have no highway bill and people will be laid off.

In this economic time, that is the last result we need. We need to fix our highways, bridges, and roads.

Madam President, the occupant of the chair is a proud member of the Environment and Public Works Committee. She has worked hard to get us to this day. I know she has worked hard to bring this debate to a close and get a path forward. We can all hope that happens today.

I will be back on the floor with Senator INHOFE. I am hopeful the two of us can lead us through this bill and get this bill done. Then I think we can have the House follow our example of Democrats and Republicans working together. If they start that over there, they will have the bill quicker than they think, and we can finally put this behind us and send a message that we are functioning.

This concept of a Federal highway system was brought to us by a Republican President, Dwight Eisenhower. He understood logistics better than most. He knew we could not have a thriving economy if we could not move goods and people. So I am hopeful. I will be back on the Senate floor when we have an agreement and we can move forward.

I will yield the floor, as I know the Senator from Vermont is here. I always look forward to his comments.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Vermont.