

We all have a stake in funding to rebuild and renew America. It's not just the quickest way to put people back to work but also to make our communities more livable, our families safer, healthier, and more economically secure. And it just might be the smoothest path to tax reform as well.

SIXTH UNANSWERED BENGHAZI QUESTION

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

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, with only six legislative days left before the Congress departs for August recess, I am increasingly concerned that we will not learn the answers to any of the questions I have raised over the past week before the one year anniversary of the attack on Benghazi, if ever. This is due, in large part, to the secretive nature of the investigation to date. Most of the key hearings into what happened that night in Benghazi have happened behind closed doors and in classified settings, including a June hearing with General Carter Ham, who was the head of the U.S. Forces in Africa the night of the attack.

That is why I was surprised to hear comments made by General Ham at the Aspen Security Forum last week where he spoke freely about the U.S. response to the attack.

Does it bother any of my colleagues that General Ham can publicly speak about the military's response at a forum in Aspen, Colorado, where the tickets were \$1,200? The American people should not have to pay \$1,200, and yet, his testimony before Congress was behind closed doors.

According to a CNN report, General Ham told the Aspen audience that by the time an American drone arrived above the U.S. consulate "the attack on the mission was winding down." By that time Ham knew Ambassador Stevens was missing and believed he could have been possibly kidnapped.

General Ham was then quoted as saying:

In my mind, at that point we were no longer in a response to an attack. We were in a recovery. And, frankly, I thought we were in a potential hostage rescue situation.

The article continued:

Ham said although he had authority to scramble a jet to the scene, he decided there was "not necessity and there was not a clear purpose in doing so."

"To do what?" Ham asked. "It was a very, very uncertain situation."

It was a very uncertain situation, indeed.

Uncertain as to whether the terrorists held our ambassador as hostage? Uncertain as to whether the terrorists would target the annex, as they did? Uncertain as to whether this situation would last hours, days, weeks, or months? Or years?

Which raises the question: If his command required no additional authority to respond to what he then believed to

be a hostage rescue situation, why did it take another 7 hours before AFRICOM ordered a C-17 aircraft in Germany to deploy to Libya to evacuate Americans? And why did that plane not leave Germany for another 8 hours after that?

If the situation appeared to be deteriorating throughout the night at the annex, why wasn't there any additional effort to accelerate air support or even planes to evacuate American personnel directly from Benghazi?

And given the betrayal of our supposed allied Libyan militia forces when calls to defend the consulate went unheeded, why would the Pentagon not move even faster to ensure there was a reliable evacuation and hostage response force to assist the Americans in Benghazi?

And given that no American plane arrived in Benghazi to support the evacuation, just what planes were used to evacuate the Americans on the morning of September 12?

The State Department's Accountability Review Board said two planes were used to transport Americans from Benghazi to Tripoli. We know that one was a Libyan Air Force C-130 that brought back the bodies of Ambassador Stevens, Sean Smith, Ty Woods, and Glen Doherty. But the first to depart was a private chartered jet that took off at 7:40 a.m. with evacuees, including all wounded personnel, according to an unclassified version of the report. But just who owned that jet? Was it the same jet that brought in the seven-person response team from Tripoli earlier that night? Was it really chartered or was it commandeered? How many wounded were evacuated on that jet? Of the wounded, how many were State Department employees, CIA employees, or security contractors?

The ARB said when the first plane arrived in Tripoli, wounded personnel were transferred to a local hospital, in exemplary coordination that helped save the lives of two severely injured Americans.

Despite my letter I sent to Secretary Kerry, I have never received a full accounting of how many Americans were injured in the attack. Are any of the wounded still receiving care in military hospitals or other medical facilities? Will we ever officially learn their names and the heroic actions that night that resulted in their serious injuries?

I think we can all agree that it would be constructive for those that were in the chain of command that night to publicly testify and answer these questions.

The American people are losing confidence in their government. How will history judge the actions or inaction of the Obama administration and the response of the Congress to the Benghazi attack?

BURDENING FUTURE GENERATIONS WITH DEFERRED MAINTENANCE

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

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Speaker, CBO's May report shows the deficit has dropped another \$220 billion. The Federal deficit continues to fall faster now than it has since post-World War II demobilization in the late forties and early fifties.

Earlier this month, OMB released its mid-session review that estimates deficits will be reduced to below 3 percent of GDP by 2017, and will continue to fall, reaching 2 percent by 2023. This recent good news hasn't eliminated the need to address our long-term fiscal crisis, but it has created some breathing space for us to renew our investments in America.

We're now 5 years removed from the financial crisis, and have yet to demonstrate an ability to balance competing needs between the long-term deficit reduction need and investments in the future that made America great. House Republicans have been obsessed by the debt, but struggle to recognize any need for investment in education, R&D, and infrastructure.

A few weeks ago, Larry Summers best summarized our predicament when he said:

Just as you burden future generations when you accumulate debt, you also burden future generations when you defer maintenance.

Given the current market, we're refusing to maintain our infrastructure at a time when investors are literally throwing money at us. To be clear, yields on the 5-, 7-, and 10-year Treasuries have been negative for the past 2 years. This past month, we've witnessed a rate jump as markets fret about QE3, yet real Treasury yields still remain below 1 percent. When accounting for inflation, rates have not been this low for many, many decades.

Republicans look the other way when it comes to this question, and I'm shocked that my colleagues who persistently say we ought to run the government like a business have so little interest in taking advantage of one of our generation's great opportunities in financing investment for the future. This is a far cry from the party of Lincoln that invested in the Homestead Act, invested in the Transcontinental Railroad, or Eisenhower's interstate highway system.

Unfortunately, Congress continues to fiddle while Rome burns. Two months ago, the I-5 bridge collapsed in the State of Washington. It was a miracle nobody died considering that 71,000 vehicles a day use that critical connection, the main route connecting Seattle to British Columbia.

□ 1015

According to the U.S. Federal Highway Administration, my own State of Virginia has 3,500, nearly one in four

bridges, that are either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete; and we're not unique in America.

In addition, many of the country's water mains and pipes are more than 100 years old. The American Society of Civil Engineers estimates it will take \$298 billion over the next 20 years to fix this situation. Otherwise, many Americans are going to get wastewater when they turn on their faucets.

More than 100,000 residents of the National Capital region learned this the hard way just a week ago when, because of lack of infrastructure, lack of infrastructure maintenance, they almost went without water.

Our choices not to invest in maintaining the critical infrastructure and the backbone of our economy is putting America at a competitive disadvantage in the next century. The Panama Canal, for example, its expansion will be completed in 2015, radically altering global trade capacity throughout the world. Yet the east coast will have only four ports capable of receiving the new post-Panamax ships.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reports these new ships will make up 62 percent of total container ship capacity in the world by 2030. Right now, China and Korea not only surpass the United States in this capacity; they lead in terms of container traffic as well. This didn't happen by accident. They invested.

Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that leaving our grandchildren with unsustainable debt is irresponsible. But what are they to think when they look back and realize we left them with a Nation of potholes, contaminated water, and crumbling bridges?

Our global competitors aren't waiting around for things to pick up here in America. They're actively investing in infrastructure to gain ground in the hopes of overtaking us in global competition. The Chinese spend billions on ports, rail, and highways; and they're not alone.

It's time to turn our attention back to the seemingly unglamorous, but critical, business of fixing America's infrastructure—our roads, our ports, our airports, our bridges and our water systems—to ensure for future generations America stays strong.

THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN TODAY

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

Mr. KINZINGER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue that, unfortunately, hasn't gotten as much attention lately as it should.

I'm a veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, spent most of my time in Iraq; but I remember I was in a nation outside of Afghanistan getting ready to fly an airplane one day, this was back in the mid-2000s, and, Mr. Speaker, the majority leader from the other Chamber basically got on television and said,

the war in Iraq is lost. He said, it's lost, it's done, it's over. I remember that because I was on a treadmill getting ready to go fly a mission into Afghanistan when I heard that.

The interesting thing about that is, I guarantee you, our enemy in Iraq probably cheered loudly at the moment they saw the majority leader from the Senate say those words.

We know that something very courageous happened. The President of the United States at the time said, not only is the war not lost, we're sending more troops and we're going to win this thing, and we did. We saw the enemy realize that America could never be defeated on the battlefield, it could only be defeated by its will, and President Bush sent a very strong and loud message that America's will will not be defeated.

This is a situation we face in Afghanistan today. Look, as a Member of Congress, as a politician, the easiest thing for me to do is to stand up here and say the war in Afghanistan is lost and we need to just go home.

And I tell you, you look at the polling, and with the lack of a President leading this country on the public opinion side of what we're doing in Afghanistan, I'd probably get a lot of people sending Facebook messages and emails saying, go get 'em; it's time to leave Afghanistan.

But you know what? If I did that, I wouldn't be able to look at myself in the mirror and say that I did the right thing, because the right thing is generations of people that have lived under oppression and have lived for years under the Taliban regime. They stood up. They kicked the Taliban out of their nation, and they've looked at the United States and said, it took you decades at your inception to get your democracy right. Help us get our democracy right.

What's at stake here?

I look over here at this picture, and I see a couple of things. I see, number one, a girl by the name of Bibi; and if you could look closely at that picture, you would see that she does not have a nose or ears. They were actually cut off by the Taliban. They were cut off by swift justice because somebody in her family committed a crime, sold her into marriage at the age of 14 years old.

And at 15 years old she left her abusive husband, went to her uncle's house, who turned his back on her, and eventually she was captured and apprehended by the Taliban, as they forced her family to cut her nose and ears off as justice for running away from a terrible situation.

She eventually escaped and went to an American forward operating base and was saved. And then you see in this other picture, as she lives in the United States, she has a prosthetic nose today and is living as close to a normal life as possible, despite the trauma that she suffered.

On the bottom down here, you'll see a number of girls in school right now,

learning and being educated. You know, before we went into Afghanistan, there was something like 800,000 people in school. Today it's over 6 million.

In fact, did you know that 60 percent of the Afghan population is under the age of 20?

And there's this movement in Afghanistan called the Civil Society in which they stand up and say it's time for freedom and it's time to take our country back.

Are you also aware, Mr. Speaker, that every province is now under control of Afghanistan, and the United States has reverted to a training mission and a counterterrorism mission. These are all huge victories for the Afghan people that we ought to be celebrating.

But, instead, I wake up the other day and I look in the paper, and the President of the United States, the leader of the free world, is saying we are exploring an option after 2014 to take all troops out of Afghanistan.

Now, let me ask you a question: Do you think that made the Taliban frightened, or do you think they cheered when they saw the President of the United States say, I'm considering all troops gone after 2014?

The whole year of 2014 was pulled out of the hat for political reasons. When you say that we're surging in Afghanistan, but as the last troop goes in, the first troop's coming out from the surge, it's not very effective.

You know, the Taliban have a saying, actually, that says, America may have the watches, but we have the time.

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Speaker, we are on the verge of a clear victory in Afghanistan for the Afghan people. The biggest mistake we can make today is to let politics come into play and to withdraw and leave zero troops after 2014. In 50 years, history will judge us for that.

SUPPORT GLASS-STEAGALL AND A RETURN TO A SOUND BANKING SYSTEM

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

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, in 1999, Congress, sadly, repealed the Glass-Steagall Act. That law had protected our Nation for over seven decades against wild speculation by Wall Street investment houses and financial giants.

When the floodgates were removed between prudent banking and speculative abandon, again, Wall Street gambled with the money of the American consumers. Look where it took us, into the worst recession since the Great Depression, into a world where we've had the largest transfer in American history of wealth from Main Street to Wall Street; and the flood continues.

Now, your savings deposits and certificates of deposits earn almost no interest. Guess who's making money off your money?