



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 113th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 159

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2013

No. 170

Senate

The Senate was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Monday, December 9, 2013, at 2 p.m.

House of Representatives

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2013

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

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
December 3, 2013.

I hereby appoint the Honorable DOUG LAMALFA 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 3, 2013, 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, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

INFRASTRUCTURE

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, Congress returns for the final days of

this year's session facing the same conundrum: people here and back home are divided over the direction of our government; they don't agree on how to fund what a growing and aging America needs.

A year ago, we were engaged in a vigorous debate on taxation. More recently, we survived the controversy surrounding the government shutdown, and we still are at loggerheads.

There are strong feelings by some that now is not the time to raise taxes, yet the spending levels enshrined in the House budget cannot produce spending bills from the Appropriations Committee that can actually pass on the House floor. In some cases, they appear to not even be able to pass from subcommittee. All the while, we are looking at a sea of unmet needs and face a floundering economy.

There is one area that can help break the logjam. It won't solve all of our problems certainly, but it will help us significantly along the way. Congress should address the critical needs of our Nation's infrastructure deficit. Roads, bridges, transit systems are all increasingly at risk. We are facing an inadequate state of repair, construction of new facilities are on hold, and we are losing ground in meeting our own needs, let alone the challenges of global competition. Yet this challenge is an opportunity for some potential progress. We know what to do to meet this challenge. We can write a new transportation bill that will meet today's needs; it just needs more money.

There is a vast coalition that supports additional resources for infra-

structure. The so-called "special interests" that are so often at odds are remarkably aligned when it comes time to recognize and fix this problem. Business, labor, professional groups, local government, environmentalists, truckers, bicyclists all agree.

The paralysis that surrounds questions of raising taxes does not necessarily need to apply in this case. Ronald Reagan, after all, was willing to sign into law a 5 cent gasoline tax increase 31 years ago when a nickel a gallon was real money. A user fee is, in fact, a different category from a general tax increase. The various groups that score such votes treat user fees differently.

As we are attempting to resolve budget differences, there is an opportunity to embrace more transportation resources through user fee mechanisms that will have broad national support and not inspire the same fierce philosophical debate that has plagued and paralyzed our deliberations for years. It has the added benefit of being the fastest way to put hundreds of thousands of people to work at family-wage jobs to help boost our flagging economy.

I strongly urge my colleagues to take a step back and look at this as a way to crack the code, to meet vast unmet needs of our constituents and stabilize a critical part of our budget. Who knows, if we can find a way to thread this particular transportation funding needle, how many additional opportunities to solve problems going forward can we then address?

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

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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I think what it takes is simply some vision and some courage. That is why people sent us here in the first place. Congress should act, demonstrating the leadership to avoid the worsening infrastructure deficit, put people to work, make our families safer, healthier, and more economically secure.

AFGHANISTAN

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

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, during the Thanksgiving break, I wrote a letter to President Obama, which I would like to submit for the record.

The letter respectfully reminded the President that President Karzai continues to thumb his nose in the eyes of the American taxpayer. We have seen many news articles reporting Karzai's refusal to sign the bilateral security agreement that this administration has proposed, an agreement that would obligate United States money and United States troops for at least 10 more years in Afghanistan.

In an Associated Press article printed in my State paper, titled, "Afghanistan President Delays Deal," the subtitle goes on to read, "U.S. says it will pull out troops if security agreement isn't signed."

Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that the House will encourage the President to pull our troops out and stop spending money that we do not have in a country that does not even want our help. Furthermore, it is my hope that the House and Senate leadership will, in 2014, allow Congress to vote on this issue of the bilateral strategic agreement.

Mr. Speaker, it is wrong that the Afghan Parliament may vote on whether they want this agreement with the United States, but the House and the Senate that represent the American people can't even have a debate and vote on the will of the American people. I know that the American people want this debate to take place. Hopefully, in 2014, the leadership of the House will at least let us have this debate on the floor of the House.

Mr. Speaker, if you could have traveled with me during the break last week, you would have heard many people in the Third District of North Carolina who said to me that they are outraged that we will continue spending money in Afghanistan at a time when we have so many financial needs at home. It is absolutely unacceptable that a single American would give his life or limb overseas without the approval of Congress. It is absolutely unacceptable that the American taxpayer would give money to a corrupt regime while young and old alike go hungry here in the United States.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to the President: Pull the troops out and bring them home now. There is not one

thing history says we will ever change in Afghanistan, and nothing, history says, will change in Afghanistan. It is time to end this senseless waste of American lives and American money in Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, this poster beside me was in the Greensboro newspaper where Mr. McGOVERN and I had written a letter saying it was time for us to pull our troops out. Mr. Speaker, this poster says "News & Record, Greensboro, North Carolina, February 2011." That's 3 years ago. We are still there, and we are talking about 10 more years. Let Congress debate. Let Congress speak. Let Congress vote the will of the American people.

Mr. Speaker, I ask God to please bless our men and women in uniform and to bless their families, and please, God, continue to bless America.

NOVEMBER 26, 2013.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA,
The White House, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: I write today due to the ongoing discussion between the United States and Afghanistan regarding a 10-year Bilateral Security Agreement to allow our troops to remain overseas beyond 2014. After reading today's Washington Post article titled "Karzai tells Susan Rice of more demands for accord extending U.S. troop presence," I once again urge you to reconsider your stance on U.S. relations with Afghanistan.

This agreement will obligate billions of American tax dollars and expose American troops to further danger overseas—all while meeting President Karzai's ever-growing list of demands. After 12 years, billions of dollars, and President Karzai's continued disrespect for the United States, many in the House and Senate believe it is time to end our commitment to Afghanistan. However, despite the risks involved, the agreement will not be brought before Congress for a vote. It is a sad day when the Afghan government has voted on the agreement, but that opportunity has been denied to the United States Congress.

Mr. President, I have seen many people and spoken at many events while at home in Eastern North Carolina, and I have received nothing but support for my position that this agreement is entirely unacceptable. I respectfully ask you to take the wishes of the American public into consideration and oppose the Bilateral Security Agreement with Afghanistan.

Sincerely,

WALTER B. JONES,
Member of Congress.

THE PLIGHT OF SYRIA'S CHRISTIANS

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

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, as winter descends upon the Middle East, the plight of Syria's people who have endured nearly 3 years of savage civil war grows more desperate with each passing day.

Fighting rages on throughout much of the country, and with the government forces making headway in recent months, many of the rebel groups have splintered, turning on each other. As in wars throughout history, it is civilians,

especially children, who have borne much of the suffering.

More than 9 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance, and a quarter of these, 2.2 million, have fled the country, mostly to neighboring Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Half of those refugees, more than a million people, are children.

Another 6.5 million Syrians are internally displaced, having fled their homes, but remaining inside the country, often in parts of Syria that have changed hands on multiple occasions and with attendant civilian suffering.

While all of Syria's people have been affected by fighting, it is Christians, who make up about 10 percent of the country's population, who are at greatest risk, given their small numbers and the increasingly religious nature of a war that started out as a broad-based secular movement that sought to change the character of the Syrian regime but not the regime itself.

For two millennia, Syria has been home to one of the oldest Christian communities in the world, a population dominated by the eastern churches, but also including smaller numbers of Catholics and Protestants. Syria's Christians have been comfortably and fully integrated into the economic, political, and cultural life of modern Syria and, despite their small numbers, are well represented among the country's elite. Tragically, this long, peaceful coexistence has been shattered, and half a million Syrian Christians, nearly one in four, have fled the country since the fighting began.

Like minorities the world over, Syrian Christians have tried to avoid getting dragged into the fighting that has gripped their homeland; but with their top two population centers, Aleppo and Homs, having seen some of the most savage fighting in the war, Christians have been unable to avoid being drawn into the conflict.

While the uprising against Syrian President Bashar Assad did not start out as a sectarian conflict, it has increasingly taken on a religious tone, as many of the rebels have wrapped themselves in the mantle of fundamentalist Islam.

Initially, the Free Syrian Army and other large rebel groupings distanced themselves from the more religious rebel factions, some of whom are linked to al Qaeda, but even they have adopted an increasingly Islamist tone in recent months. This has exacerbated the plight of the Christians who are increasingly targeted simply because they are Christian and because they are seen by many Muslims as having backed the government.

The truth is that Syrian Christians, many of whom have family members among my Armenian American constituents, did not rally to the regime. Syrian Christians, like most other Syrians, simply wanted a freer, more open society and a greater voice in their own government. It is a testament to the depth of Christian desperation that