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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

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2013

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

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,

December 4, 2013.

I hereby appoint the Honorable PAUL COOK 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.

AFGHANISTAN

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

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I came to the floor to speak about the bilateral strategic agreement and the

fact that President Karzai has refused to sign the proposal offered by the administration.

Since we have been in Afghanistan, 2,285 Americans have given their lives for our country, and 19,514 have been wounded. The time has come for Congress to understand history. From the days of Alexander the Great, to the British, to the Russians, no one has ever changed Afghanistan.

The American people are tired of the cost of war, both life and money. As I said yesterday, it is my hope that, in early 2014, the leadership of the House will permit a debate and a vote on the agreement that will obligate our country to Afghanistan for at least 10 more years. I realize that the vote will not change the agreement, because the President does have the authority, but this will give us a chance to represent the people of America who, the majority, are opposed to this agreement.

It is unacceptable that we will continue to spend billions of dollars at a time when, according to Special Inspector General John Sopko, the waste, fraud, and abuse is worse in Afghanistan today than it was 11 years ago.

We in Congress continue to cut funding for programs for the American people, but we refuse to withhold one single dollar from Karzai in Afghanistan. No wonder the American people have given Congress an approval rating of 9 percent.

It is time to end the senseless waste of American lives and American money in Afghanistan.

I want to thank Roger Simon for his editorial in today's Politico, and I

would like to read the last paragraph of his editorial. He writes:

Is this the neighborhood we want to stay in? And fight for? And throw more money at? We have achieved our goals in Afghanistan. We have won. It is time for our troops to come home. If we stay for another decade, our good war could come to a very bad end.

So, again, Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that when we get into 2014, that both parties will come together and say that we need to debate on whether this agreement for 10 years is worth one life or one dollar. And I believe it will be a vigorous debate. I think it will be good that the American people can see that we hear them as it relates to this war in Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, before I close, I have got a poster from the Greensboro News & Record dated February 27, 2011. It is the military carrying a flag-draped coffin off the back of a plane. How many more young Americans will have to go and walk the roads of Afghanistan and be killed and lose their limbs?

I hope that my colleagues in both parties will join those of us in both parties who want to have this debate on Afghanistan in 2014.

Mr. Speaker, I will close now by asking God to please bless our men in uniform, to bless the families of our men and women in uniform, and God to hold in His arms the families who have given a child dying for freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq.

THE GAS TAX

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from

□ 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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Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, for as long as I have been in Congress, both parties and two successive administrations have danced around the issue of our infrastructure deficit. For all the attention to the various fiscal cliffs, the looming infrastructure deficit is every bit as critical.

For two centuries, infrastructure was a bipartisan issue, from Lincoln, with the transcontinental railroad, to Democrats and Republicans coming together to launch the interstate freeway system signed into law by President Eisenhower. Subsequent road, transit and water investments helped fuel our economy and tie the Nation together.

More recently, the failure to address long-term funding has also been bipartisan. The Bush administration ignored strong recommendations from their own private sector experts that they empanelled to give advice.

Although the Obama administration did request and employ some modest funding in the Recovery Act and has proposed an infrastructure bank and talked extensively and, I think, sincerely about the need for investment, what has been lacking has been a specific, concrete proposal from either party to address infrastructure financing in America.

While the political maneuvering has occurred here in Washington, the gap in the highway trust fund has been growing, and conditions of our roads, bridges, and transit systems have been deteriorating. This puts America at a competitive disadvantage, complicates the movement of goods and people, and contributes to congestion and pollution.

At the same time the needs grow, the resources are in significant decline. The gas tax has not been increased since the Clinton administration 20 years ago. The future prospects are even worse. Demands are increasing and deferred maintenance takes its toll while we watch the bottom fall out of the highway trust fund.

We have seen a slowdown in revenue due to the near collapse of the economy, a shift in driving patterns while people, especially young people, drive less, and, of course there is improved fuel efficiency. It is scheduled to further reduce gas consumption dramatically with improved mileage for conventional vehicles, to say nothing of hybrids, plug-in hybrids, and electric vehicles.

It is time for Congress to act. We have seen our partners at the State level increase transportation funding in 13 States, but they need Congress to act to maintain that partnership.

There is a large coalition that stands ready to support Congress. U.S. chamber, the national AFL-CIO, building trades, trucking industry, numerous associations of small and medium businesses, local chambers of commerce, local government, professional organizations, bicyclists, the coalition is

broad and persuasive requesting Congress to tax them.

Any resources would have a powerful effect on the economy. The relatively small amount in the Recovery Act for infrastructure created many jobs because there is a strong multiplier effect, about 36,000 jobs for each billion dollars invested. And these are family-wage jobs all across America that aren't going to be outsourced overseas.

In less than a year, the transportation bill expires, and absent congressional action, we face a precipitous drop in transportation funding next year and a reduction of 30 percent overall for the next decade.

It doesn't need to be this way. I am proposing we implement the three-step, 15-cent-per-gallon tax increase that was part of the Simpson-Bowles deficit reduction proposal. Communities and industry need certainty, especially for larger projects that are multistate and multiyear.

And this should be the last Federal gas tax increase. Over the next 10 years, we need to replace funding for transportation that is based on gallons of fuel consumed, which is going to be declining, with something more sustainable, a reasonable adjustment now and a permanent fix in the future, so we can stop this dance of avoidance.

We will find broad support for this form of user fee, which, historically, has been acceptable to Republicans as well, including Ronald Reagan, who increased the gas tax a nickel a gallon back when that was real money in 1982, and he established the mass transit trust fund account.

Let's address the infrastructure deficit, stabilizing transportation funding, and help revitalize and enhance America's all-too-slow economic recovery. The time is now.

AN ADMONITION AND A REDIRECTION

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

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today for an admonition and a redirection, somewhat of a philosophical conversation.

America started with a great, healthy reality of what government can do and what government cannot do. A government can't really control all of what is happening in every State from one central area. We begin at the very beginning with individual States, individual local government, individuals making decisions for their family.

Right now, we see in every poll, in every conversation, that every one of us has this great frustration that is rising among the American people. That frustration is not rising because the American vision, the American Dream, and the American spirit is failing. That frustration is rising somewhat because of what we are doing and because of this constant challenge that is occur-

ring nationwide to the concept of a representative republic, the constant asking of the question: Has this become too gridlocked? Has it become too partisan? Has it become too hard to be able to get things done?

Maybe we need to do it a different way. Quite frankly, the American people know in their hearts that they should be represented, they should be heard, justice should be done, trust should be here, common sense should prevail. The basic principle among so many people, that we should speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, that every American should be heard, it goes from the Book of Proverbs to the very foundation of our constitutional system now.

So what do we do about that?

Well, around the world we see it. We see the frustration of other people in other countries. We see it in Syria as they are split up in a civil war. We see it in Cairo, in the streets at yet another set of protests. We see in Thailand, the absolute corruption of their government breaking out in things. We see votes in the Parliament in the Ukraine right now as worldwide, continent by continent, there is constant frustration with their government and people rise up in the streets.

What do we do about it? How do we lead? We are the leaders in our country. So what do we do?

Here is my quick admonition to us:

Stop running down America and each other. We are different. We think different, we function different, our families function different, but we should still be able to honor each other.

We see each other's worst. We see on the social media sites and we see on the press reports and we see everything else. We know so much about each other that there is this sense that it is different now. But quite frankly, Americans have always been flawed people. But we are people that are gathered around our work, our faith, our community, and our family, and that has made us different.

We have got to stop demeaning a representative republic. This constant statement of "we are gridlocked and things aren't working" implies to people all over the country maybe this system of government that made us the most powerful economy, the most powerful military, the greatest bastion for freedom the world has ever known, maybe it doesn't work anymore.

The problem is not a representative republic. The problem is not our Constitution. The problem is we are trying to do something that is not that. We are shifting away from the way that we were founded into something that doesn't really exist.

Quite frankly, the partisan gridlock is not something new. The patron saint of Oklahoma is Will Rogers. You can take every joke he made about Congress in the 1920s and pull it up today and it is still funny because things haven't changed on that because, quite frankly, we think different. But that is