

10:45 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Washington.

HIGHWAY TRUST FUND

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I came to the Senate floor in April to warn my colleagues of a looming crisis in the highway trust fund. I told them if Congress didn't act and the fund reached critically low levels, it would cause construction shutdowns in communities across the country. It would cost jobs and threaten our fragile economic recovery. It would hurt families who depend on safe and efficient roads and bridges.

I had hoped that we could address this issue sooner. I had hoped those of us in Congress who understand the importance of strong infrastructure investments could have come together, not just to avoid a crisis but for a long-term solution. We weren't able to do that.

But today, after 4 months of warning of this looming crisis, I am pleased to come to the floor as we work to do what should be easy but too often isn't in the Senate—to avoid a completely unnecessary and completely damaging crisis. This is a step in the right direction. As many of us here know very well, it is a step that Congress has not taken each time a crisis approached.

For far too many years, Congress has been lurching from crisis to crisis, from debt limit scares to fiscal cliffs. That dysfunction hit a peak last October with a government shutdown over a misguided attempt to block the Affordable Care Act from covering millions of families and with another Federal default scare. The lurching from crisis to crisis with constant dysfunction and uncertainty hurt workers and our families, and it shook the confidence of people across the country who expect their elected officials to work together to get things done.

But when the government shutdown finally ended last year, I sat down with House Budget Committee Chairman PAUL RYAN in a budget conference. We worked together, we compromised, and we reached a 2-year budget deal that prevented another government shutdown and rolled back devastating cuts from sequestration.

That bipartisan budget deal moved us away from these constant crises and showed the American people that we can do our jobs when we are willing to work together. I believe it showed my Republican colleagues that putting the American people through these constant artificial crises is not only bad for the country overall, it is not good for Republicans either.

Since that bipartisan budget deal, we have been able to build on that bipartisan momentum in some very important ways. I was proud to work with the junior Senator from Georgia and a

number of Democrats and Republicans on a bipartisan bill to invest in workforce training.

Our legislation passed both the House and the Senate with overwhelming bipartisan support, and this week it will officially become law. That kind of bipartisan work to help our workers and the economy wouldn't be possible if we were still in a constant crisis mode.

That is why I have been so hopeful we could avoid lurching toward yet another needless crisis—this time in our highway trust fund. The consequences of Congress failing to shore up the highway trust fund are clear. In fact, many of our States have already been bracing for a worst-case scenario. Arkansas, for example, has already put the brakes on 15 highway projects that would have widened their highways and repaired their bridges.

In Colorado, State officials are planning a project to ease congestion to give some much-needed relief to drivers between Denver and Fort Collins, but a lapse in our Federal funding could have put that project on hold.

Those are not isolated cases. Across the country more than 100,000 projects would have been at risk next year and 700,000 jobs would have been on the line if Congress failed to replenish the highway trust fund according to the Department of Transportation.

I am pleased Congress is finally coming together and working to avoid a construction shutdown this summer. Republicans in the House have pushed aside the tea party branch and passed a bill to avoid a construction shutdown this summer, with no ransom demands, no programmatic spending cuts, and no tea party policy riders.

I do support the bipartisan Senate proposal from the Finance Committee, which includes provisions to improve compliance with tax laws.

My colleague, the junior Senator from California, is right. We need pressure on Republicans to come back before the end of this Congress to work with us toward a long-term solution, but I am very pleased we are working together to get this done and avoid this unnecessary crisis that would have put jobs and our economy at risk.

This bill will be a step in the right direction, but then we need to take the next step. We need to keep this bipartisanship going, and we need to work together to find a long-term solution to the highway trust fund's revenue shortfall. That is the only way we can truly put an end to constant crises and short-term patches, and it is the only way we can give our States and businesses the certainty they need and deserve to plan projects and invest in their economies.

Once again, I am pleased we are moving toward avoiding a completely unnecessary construction shutdown, and I am pleased that the House Republicans seem to understand that it is better for them and our country to push the tea party aside and work with us—not to push us into another crisis.

I am hopeful we can build on this bipartisan effort and keep working together to create jobs, economic growth, and a fair shot and true opportunity for families across our country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, while the Senator from Washington is on the floor, I think it is appropriate to note and congratulate her for her work on the Workforce Investment Act.

She and Senator ISAKSON of Georgia led the effort of Senator HARKIN, me, and others in the Senate. Senator SCOTT of South Carolina was the principal sponsor of the House-passed SKILLS Act. Senator ENZI of Wyoming had worked for a long time—and as the Republican leader said, that bill is being signed today by the President of the United States.

It goes directly to the issue that most Americans care about. It is too hard to find a job. What this process showed was that Republicans and Democrats were able to take the nearly \$10 billion that we currently spend on job training to give Governors the flexibility to help people develop skills and match job seekers with good jobs in their communities. I remember our former Democratic Governor from Tennessee told me that when he came into office, he threw up his hands when he found out about the \$145 million that came to Tennessee through the Workforce Investment Act because it was too complicated.

Senator MURRAY, Senator ISAKSON, and others have worked together with Chairman KLINE in the House, and they produced a law that will be signed today. The Senate is far from functioning the way it ought to. There is too much talent in the Senate and too many pressing problems in the country for us to be anywhere close to satisfied with the result we are getting. But the committee upon which the Senator from Washington and I serve has done a pretty good job in this Congress. We reported to the Senate 20 pieces of legislation; 18 of them have passed the Senate, and 14 of them have been signed into law.

That may be more than the entire Senate put together.

The point is, those are big pieces of legislation. One is the jobs bill. That is the issue we care about more than any other.

Another was the track-and-trace legislation which makes medicines safer for 4 billion prescriptions. Senator BURR and Senator MIKULSKI worked on that.

Another was on compounding pharmacies. It was a terrible problem where we had tainted, sterile injections not being sterile and causing people to catch meningitis and die.

Last year another was the student loan program, where we took all the new loans—that is \$100 billion a year—and put a market-pricing system on top and took it out of the political football stunt category.

All of that has happened on a committee which has, on its left, 12 Democrats, and on its right, 10 Republicans. We don't agree on everything by a long shot. But on these issues we came to a result, did the job, and the Senator from Washington has been a conspicuous example of looking for opportunities for us to get a result.

People expect us to come to the Senate, stand on our principles, but not stop there—not stop there—and then put our principles together where we can combine those and get a result for the American people. I am pleased to be a part of that action and I congratulate her for it.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Today I am here to say the world is watching Venezuela. The Senate especially is watching human rights abuse in Venezuela. I especially am watching the case of Leopoldo Lopez, who has been in prison for 5 months. For what? For leading a political party and exercising his constitutional rights.

Senator MENENDEZ, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, has spoken out about human rights abuse in Venezuela. Senator CORKER, the ranking Republican on Foreign Relations has spoken out about human rights abuse in Venezuela. Yesterday, Senator CRUZ of Texas gave an impassioned speech about Leopoldo Lopez in Venezuela and that conspicuous example of human rights abuse. Senator RUBIO of Florida has been at the forefront of this discussion with his leadership on the Foreign Relations Committee.

Today, I wish to speak about human rights abuse in Venezuela and to say to President Maduro in Venezuela that the world is watching. The world is watching him and his efforts to imprison his principal political opponent, Leopoldo Lopez.

Mr. President, many of us have visited Robben Island off South Africa's coast. When my family and I did that a few years ago, there was no moment that impressed me more in that visit than when some of those who were imprisoned there with Nelson Mandela still give tours of Robben Island, about where he lived and where he exercised and how he conducted himself in the 27 years he was there before he came back and was freed and became one of the most important persons in our world history.

It seems to me President Maduro of Venezuela is determined to turn Leopoldo Lopez into the Nelson Mandela of Venezuela by his unconscionable imprisonment of him principally because Leopoldo has spoken out and has expressed his political views about the country he loves.

Leopoldo was born in Venezuela and comes from a patriotic Venezuelan family, but he was educated in the United States which is where I met him. I met him when he was a student at Kenyon College. In fact, I made the graduation speech, when I was Secretary of Education, to the class in

which he graduated, and he was a friend of my son who was also a student. I watched him over the years. He went on to Harvard and obtained a master's degree at the Kennedy School. He could have stayed in the United States and had a very successful career, but he chose instead to return to the country he loved, Venezuela. He was elected mayor of a municipality at the age of 28 in an important area outside of Caracas. Four years later he was reelected with 81 percent of the vote. He is a rising star in Venezuela. There is no brighter star rising in the skies of Venezuela.

Hugo Chavez's government knew that someone like Leopoldo, who is well educated, charismatic, purposeful, and honest, with a desire to help his fellow Venezuelans, would do nothing but cause problems for their socialist government, so they barred him from running for public office and accused him of misusing public funds.

I suppose a lot of us would like to bar our principal opponents from running against us. The Senator from New Jersey and I are both in elections this year, but it hasn't occurred to us that in the United States we could actually do that. Elections are the lifeblood of our political system and the lifeblood of this country and the lifeblood of our liberty and freedom, but in Venezuela if you don't like your opponent, you just say they cannot run for office. That is what they did to Leopoldo.

Leopoldo fought back, taking his case all the way to the Inter-American Court for Human Rights and he won. I had an opportunity to see him in 2011 when he did that. I knew he would win his case. Anyone who listened to it believed that. He then stayed in Venezuela. He faced assassination attempts, harassment, threats, but never wavered in his call for the Venezuelan people to take action against the oppressive regime of Hugo Chavez and more recently Nicolas Maduro.

Venezuela is a rich country and has lots of money, but people cannot get toothpaste, people cannot get tissues. The inflation there is more than 50 percent. You would expect there to be a leader demanding change from the government, someone who could express the views of the people. Leopoldo is that person, but he has been in jail for 5 months. He has been barred from running for public office because he is that leader.

He is a husband. He is the father of two young children. He chose to turn himself in to face trial. He could have come to the United States or some other country and said, "I am in exile. I am a popular Venezuelan and I'll take the brave act of going into exile." No, he didn't do that. He turned himself in, with a crowd of hundreds of thousands of people behind him, because he is in the tradition of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mandela, and others is focusing his resistance in a nonviolent and a constitutional way. That is his lesson to the people of Venezuela.

However, he is in jail and has been for 5 months, and President Maduro keeps him there to silence the opposition. Or so the President thinks. Leopoldo's trial starts tomorrow. I say trial, although it is not a trial that we would recognize.

The distinguished chairman of the Judiciary Committee is on the floor today. He has been a leading spokesman for human rights across the country. He, too, is interested in human rights abuse in Venezuela. He would not recognize this trial.

The defense team of Leopoldo has attempted to bring forward 60 witnesses plus other experts to testify on their client's behalf. However, during a preliminary hearing every single witness for the defense was disqualified.

There is the distinguished lawyer, the Senator from Massachusetts, on the other side of the aisle. She knows what a trial is. She recognizes human abuse when she sees it, just as all of us do. So I think it is important for President Maduro, the people of Venezuela and the people in Venezuela who have been subjected to human rights abuse to know that is not going unnoticed in the United States of America, that there are Senators on the Democratic side and on the Republican side of the aisle who are paying close attention to this; that our State Department is reviewing this very carefully; that this sort of human rights abuse in Venezuela—a country badly in need of political discourse and leadership—is something we should not ignore. We should say to President Maduro: Free Leopoldo Lopez. By locking him up for 5 months you are not silencing him. You are helping to make him the Nelson Mandela of Venezuela.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I thank my friend from Tennessee who has said that the trial he described is not a trial. It is a sham, and no honest and civilized country, no country that has even a pretense upon the rule of law should accept that kind of a trial. So I applaud the senior Senator from Tennessee for his comments.

JUSTICE FOR ALL REAUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I have been on this floor many times to talk about the need to support law enforcement and to ensure our criminal justice system serves everyone fairly. I do so again in light of a very disturbing report issued by the Justice Department's inspector general last week which describes serious flaws in some of our Nation's crime labs. The report focused on 13 crime lab examiners whose work was seriously flawed, but the worst part is that their testimony contributed to the convictions of thousands of offenders, including 60 people on death row.