

BUDGET WEEK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. WOODALL) is recognized for the remainder of the hour as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. WOODALL. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the time, and I would like to start our time tonight by yielding to my friend from Florida (Ms. WILSON).

WE BROUGHT BACK FIVE OF THE KIDNAPPED GIRLS

Ms. WILSON of Florida. Thank you, Representative WOODALL, for this honor and this pleasure. I am indebted to you forever. Thank you.

I just finished making a speech about Boko Haram and girls who were kidnapped in Nigeria. Five of them are in the gallery today, and I thought it not robbery to recognize them and ask you who are listening to please tweet #bringbackourgirls and tweet #joinrepwilson. These young ladies were kidnapped, and they had the courage—the courage—to come to America to continue their education. They are right there in the gallery.

Thank you, Representative WOODALL.

Mr. WOODALL. Mr. Speaker, as you know, this is the conclusion of budget week here. I sit on the Budget Committee. I enjoy budget week. It is a statement of our values as a nation. Where you put your money is where you are putting your emphasis. A lot of folks don't want to put their money where their mouth is. We have a lot of mouths in this town. This is the week where everybody gets to put their money where their mouth is.

One of those issues that we have been struggling with has been the issue of transportation funding. I come from a very conservative district in Georgia, Mr. Speaker, and one of the counties—I only represent two—one of those counties, Forsyth County, just voted to tax itself with a \$200 million bond initiative to widen a highway. Because we are the fastest growing county in the State, we sit in traffic hour upon hour upon hour.

It is not that conservatives don't want to tax themselves. It is that conservatives don't want to tax themselves and then throw that money down a rat hole. If we can develop a trust that, if you tax a family a dollar that they will get a dollar's worth of services—needed services, desired services—for that dollar, we would have a very different relationship with the Federal Government.

□ 1245

Mr. Speaker, I have up here a reference to article I, section 8, clause 7 of the United States Constitution which says:

The Congress shall have the power to establish post offices and post roads.

Commerce, at the time of the writing of our Constitution, Mr. Speaker, took place through the post office and those post roads. There was an obligation

that our Founding Fathers recognized to develop routes of commerce so that goods could travel, so that messages could travel, so that people could travel.

I say that because too often the conversation in Washington devolves into: Should we spend money at all, or should we spend obscene amounts of it that we have to borrow from our children? That is not the conversation we are having. We have a constitutional obligation to maintain, establish and maintain the post roads, those corridors of commerce around this Nation. The Federal Government took that responsibility on in one of the great building projects of our history, building the Eisenhower Interstate Highway System.

I want to build things, Mr. Speaker. So often this Congress gets involved in doing things that my community is doing just fine back home, that my county is doing just fine back home, that my State is doing just fine back home. And for some reason we think when the 435 of us gather together, we are going to come up with a better idea about how to better serve my community back home than my community back home has about how to serve my community. I think we get off track there. I think we get into those unconstitutional uses of power. Establishing post roads—one of those things our Founding Fathers asked the government to do, because, quite simply, no one else can build an interstate highway system. It does no good for Georgia to have 12 lanes running to the Alabama border if Alabama doesn't have a road when we get there. This is a collaborative decision, and rightfully so.

So how do we fund these highways, Mr. Speaker? We fund them primarily through what is called the highway trust fund, and the highway trust fund is funded through taxes on users of the highway system. I am a huge fan of user fees. If you don't like to sit in traffic every morning, if you want to build an extra lane on your highway, as we are in Forsyth County, you should pay to build that extra lane on your highway. You shouldn't ask somebody in Wyoming to pay to build the road in Georgia. We should build the road in Georgia. Users of the roads should pay for the roads. So that is what we do.

What you can't see here, Mr. Speaker, is a graph of how the highway trust fund is funded. Primarily, it is through a gas tax. It is 18.4 cents that comes out of every gallon of gas that Americans buy. That gas tax is primarily the funding mechanism.

But we also tax diesel, so all the truckers who are on the road, every time you are driving down that two-lane highway and you wish the guy in front of you was going a little bit faster, just know that he is paying a lot in taxes while he is on that road. He is helping to build that road. Diesel taxes are higher than gasoline taxes, but because there are fewer diesel vehicles on the road, bring in less revenue.

We also have a tax on all trucks and trailers. We have a tax in this blue line on heavy vehicles, and we have a tax on tires. Again, all of these taxes come together not to tax one group of people to pay for another, but to tax users of our roads to pay for our roads. It has been a system that has served us fairly well in this Nation.

But we haven't raised that gas tax since the early 1990s. In the early 1990s, we set the gas tax at 18.4 cents a gallon, and we haven't raised it since. Mr. Speaker, I am not in favor of raising taxes. I am in favor of paying less taxes. I am in favor of taking on more of that responsibility back home.

But, again, in the case of post roads, we have to take on this responsibility. And the reason I am having this Special Order tonight, Mr. Speaker, is because the highway trust fund expires in May. We have about 2 months to sort out all of the challenges of how do we fund the Interstate Highway System going forward.

And for folks who say, Well, we have been funding it with an 18.4 cent gas tax for 25 years, why isn't that good enough today? the answer is, it may be, it may be good enough today. But understand that the buying power that we are getting out of that 18.4 cents has declined each and every year. Of course it has. The price of a Big Mac has gone up over the past 20 years, the price of a car has gone up over the past 20 years, the price of a home has gone up, the price of building roads has gone up, so the purchasing power that we are getting for our gas tax has gone down and down and down and down. Right now we are getting about 60 percent of the value out of that gas tax that we were getting when it was last changed in the early 1990s.

Now, what is the impact of that? Well, it is not just that the value of the purchasing power is going down; the mileage we are getting in our cars is going up.

My first car, Mr. Speaker—I don't know what your first car was—mine was a 1971 Volkswagen camper. I had 59 horsepower in the back of that camper to drive me anywhere I wanted to go. If I coasted downhill and only used the accelerator a little bit uphill, I would max out about 35 miles an hour. But I could get 14 miles a gallon if I tried. If I tried to drive that camper as efficiently as I could, I could get 14 miles to the gallon.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I am driving a Chevy Volt. Most of my driving is free. It is coming off the battery. I am not paying any gas taxes at all. When I do have to turn on the electric generator in that Chevy Volt, I am getting 40 miles to the gallon. Just in my lifetime, the fuel efficiency is either triple, based on an engine, or no gas tax at all because I am using electricity.

This is what has happened. You go back to 1975, Mr. Speaker, this is the average miles per gallon that passenger cars and light trucks were getting. You get into the last half of the last decade,

you see that fuel efficiency is driving sharply forward, and the Obama administration wants to drive that fuel efficiency even higher. I am in favor of using private industry to create more efficient solutions. I am in favor of being able to reduce the fuel costs of families across this country. But what that is going to do as families are buying fewer and fewer gallons of gasoline is that the highway trust fund is going to get smaller and smaller and smaller.

Take a look at what has happened with the highway trust fund, Mr. Speaker. Beginning back in, I would say, the early 1990s, when folks were buying lots of gasoline and fuel costs were relatively low, the economy was doing well. We were running a trust fund surplus. Again, all of this gas tax money is coming in from all of these sources. We were spending it on those priorities that we have in the Interstate Highway System. Some of those priorities were building new interstate highways, some of those priorities were maintaining old interstate highways, some of those priorities were simply widening part of the Interstate Highway System. But we operated with a bit of a surplus in the transportation trust fund.

The reason this conversation has to happen today, Mr. Speaker, is that folks are returning to their districts for 2 weeks, where they are going to be hearing from folks who are sitting in that traffic, where they are going to be hearing from folks whose contracts to build those highways are about to expire. They are going to hear from their Governors and their state legislators who are no longer able to let the contracts for needed projects. Why? Because the money is expiring in 2 months. We are starting to run a trust fund deficit. There is not enough money coming in to meet the current needs.

Mr. Speaker, I don't really enjoy talking about the current needs. I didn't run for Congress to be in the maintenance business. I ran for Congress to be in the transformation business. I am more than a little embarrassed that what we are talking about here is, How do we maintain and improve the Eisenhower Interstate Highway System. Eisenhower was long gone from office before I was even born.

We are talking about how to maintain this infrastructure. I would like to be in the driverless car infrastructure business. I would like to be in the hypersonic jet infrastructure business. But where we are, because the calendar dictates it, is: How do we continue to maintain safe highways just 2 months from now?

You can't see these tick marks, Mr. Speaker, but we are talking about in the ballpark of \$50 billion a year that goes into this effort, thousands and thousands and thousands of miles of interstate highways around the country, about \$50 billion a year. The deficits are running down ultimately, by the end of our 10-year budget window,

to almost \$130 billion in highway deficits. We have to find a way to meet those needs.

We had a hearing in our committee just the other day, the Transportation Committee, Mr. Speaker, and I want to quote the mayor of Salt Lake City. He was there on behalf of the National League of Cities. This is not a notoriously conservative organization. Mayors are a practical bunch by nature. They have to respond to the needs of all of their citizens. They are a relatively liberal bunch by nature. But he says this:

I can tell you as someone who has spent a career working as a NEPA planner and lawyer that what has happened with what I view as an absolutely great environmental law, the National Environmental Policy Act, is truly unfortunate. We have gone from processes that should be a year or year and a half to processes that are 5 to 7 years in many big transportation projects.

NEPA is the Environmental Policy Act. That is what federally regulates all environmental decisions across the country, particularly as it relates to construction.

Time is money, Mr. Speaker, in transportation projects. There is not a Member in this Chamber who wants to see environmental degradation in this country. There is not a Member in this Chamber who wants to see the sky is less blue or the grass less green. Every Member in this Chamber cares about children and grandchildren and the next generation.

But here we have an advocate for the environmental protection laws that are available to us in this country and he says: Something has gone awry. We wrote this wonderful law in order to protect our environment, but now, instead of being able to complete needed projects in a year or 18 months, with litigation, special interest groups, these processes get dragged on for 5, 6, or 7 years, and that time means more money out of the highway trust fund in order to complete that project.

So what are we going to do, Mr. Speaker, about these coming trust fund deficits? Well, one thing we can do is help to address the policy failures that are delivering less than a dollar's worth of value to my constituents and your constituents for their dollar's worth of gas tax. If I could build a project today with that dollar, I could get a dollar's worth of value out of it, if I have to litigate the issue for 7 years, the value of that dollar is going to erode. I am going to have to waste that dollar on litigation costs.

We can change the law, and we can do so in a bipartisan way that absolutely respects all of our commitments to environmental protection but allows us to complete these needed taxes. Because I will tell you what doesn't help global warming, Mr. Speaker, and that is folks sitting on Atlanta highways for an hour every day not moving. If you are concerned about the use of fossil

fuels in this country, I promise you that having people move slower in Atlanta is not helping. We need those folks to be able to move more quickly to their goal. We will reduce emissions as a result.

What else can we do, Mr. Speaker, as a body? What I have here—and I just chose the State of Georgia because it is that area that I know best—these are the Georgia statewide designated freight corridors. I live right up here, just outside of Atlanta, Mr. Speaker. I am right off I-85. That is Interstate 85, Federal Interstate 85, and that is designated as a freight corridor.

Our use of the roads is not just to get to and from the grocery store, of course, not just to get to and from school, but for farmers to get their produce from Iowa to our grocery store, for manufacturers to get their products from the computer factory in California to our schools. We had a national interest in these freight corridors.

One of these freight corridors runs out I-16. It runs out to the Port of Savannah. The Port of Savannah, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if you know, it is the fastest-growing container port in the country, a container port being those ports that specialize in getting those 18-wheeler cargo containers off the ships, onto a chassis, delivering goods to where they need to go. Fastest-growing container port in the country, it sits out here at the end of I-16. We have major construction projects to get all the product off those ships out across the southeastern United States.

So this map of red lines, Mr. Speaker, represents not only interstate highways, but also some major Federal roads. I have got U.S. 1 listed here. U.S. 1, Mr. Speaker, as you may know, runs about, golly, about 2½ miles from this building. About 2½ miles west from this building you are going to hit U.S. 1.

□ 1300

U.S. 1 runs all the way down the eastern coast, from the great Northeast all the way down to Florida. It is a Federal transportation corridor. What is not on this list, Mr. Speaker, for example, is U.S. Highway 29. It runs right past my house in Gwinnett County.

It is a U.S. highway, and it consumes U.S. transportation dollars. While once upon a time it was a major corridor for moving nationally important equipment—freight, produce—today, it has become a sidebar.

My question is: If we are limited with our dollars, can we be more discriminating in choosing which roads have national importance?

I told you the tale of Forsyth County, which I represent, Mr. Speaker, and of its having the \$200 million bond initiative to expand its major highway. Georgia 400 is its major highway. We don't need the Federal Government to take care of every single square inch of pavement in this country.

When we talked about establishing postal roads in 1787, there was kind of

the understanding that—of course, they had not contemplated pavement at all—if this were going to be a major maintained thoroughfare, we might have a Federal interest in it—not so anymore.

I talked about U.S. 1, Mr. Speaker. U.S. 1 is right out here, about 2½ miles away, but it is just between Washington, D.C., and Baltimore. The Federal Government, with Federal tax dollars that are collected from all across the Nation, maintains three separate Federal roads.

We maintain the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, which is a National Park Service road. We take care of U.S. 1, and we take care of Interstate 95. Those roads are never more than 5 miles from each other; yet, because tradition dictates it, we are spending national dollars to maintain three relatively duplicative pieces of highway.

We have got to have that conversation. Maybe there is a reason unbeknownst to me why it is we can't just maintain one of those roads and why we have to maintain them all.

The Federal Government doesn't have to do everything for everybody, Mr. Speaker. We just have to make sure that those interstate corridors are being maintained, that those primary nationally designated freight corridors are being maintained.

It is okay to leave the rest for communities and States to handle. I want to give you an example. I am not picking on anybody in particular. These projects go on all across the country, Mr. Speaker.

You can see someone's home right here. They have got some holly bushes out in front and a little maple tree here that has been planted on the right-of-way. What you see here are brand-new curbs and sidewalks and about a 3½-foot bike lane that we spent a million Federal dollars to build.

Now, assuming this family wants a giant curb and a big sidewalk and a bike lane in their front yard, I am glad they were able to get it. I am glad that we are planting maple trees in the right-of-way there. We are not quite mowing the grass in that space, but I hope the community is going to take on that challenge.

This is not a major freight corridor. This is not an Interstate Highway System. This is a small, small road somewhere in America that \$1 million worth of Federal taxpayer dollars are going to in order to beautify a street.

Mr. Speaker, it comes from a program called the Transportation Alternatives Program. Over the last 2 years, that has been more than \$1 billion going towards these kinds of projects, almost \$2 billion.

Let me tell you what kinds of big, important Federal projects are kind of rising to that constitutional level of building post roads for commerce.

Anything that you build that relates to a sidewalk counts. Anything that you create relating to bicycle infrastructure counts. Traffic calming tech-

niques—I don't know what a traffic calming technique is, but if you can identify one, Mr. Speaker, we can pay for it out of this multibillion-dollar trust fund.

The construction of turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas—Mr. Speaker, you do not want to be behind me when I am riding through a national park. You do not want to be behind me while I am going down that beautiful highway in Virginia that is running all the way down to the great State of Georgia because I am driving slowly, sucking it all in, and am turning in to every turnout along the way and am taking pictures.

I love a good drive, particularly in the fall, but I promise you I do not need one taxpayer dollar paying for one turnout on one highway so that I can get a better picture. We have got an entire Georgia transportation and tourism board, Mr. Speaker.

If we need a turnout in the great State of Georgia, if it is going to bring more tourist traffic to our area, if it is going to allow us to put in a small restaurant where folks can stop and eat and enjoy our beautiful scenery, we will build that because tourists will demand it, and it will grow our economy.

At a time when trust fund dollars have been eroded by inflation, at a time when we know we don't have enough money coming in to maintain our current Interstate Highway System, at a time that we are talking about raising taxes on the American consumer in order to provide those resources, isn't it also time to end the non-Federal priority spending that is currently embedded in the Federal gas tax, like turnouts?

Mr. Speaker, one of the projects that was built with that multibillion-dollar trust fund was down in the great State of Georgia. It is called the Silver Comet Trail. The truth is that we only have one really good, long bike trail in the entire metropolitan Atlanta area. It is the Silver Comet Trail, and it is fabulous. It is absolutely fabulous.

If you go out there on any beautiful day, you are going to have joggers; you are going to have walkers; you are going to have bike riders; folks are going to be pushing strollers. It is a festival of humanity there on that bike trail. It is a wonderful, wonderful way to spend your day. We spent 3.7 million Federal dollars so that my neighbors and I could have a fabulous biking and walking trail in our backyard. It was not my idea. I was not in Congress at the time.

We have got to ask ourselves: Is it worth raising taxes on the American driver and on American industry, which uses our roads, so that more local communities can build more fabulous bike trails in their own backyards?

I don't ask my colleagues, Mr. Speaker, whether bike trails are valuable or not. I believe them to be so. I ask my colleagues whether or not metropolitan Atlanta, which is the most prosperous

major metropolitan city in the entire Southeastern United States, can afford to build its own bike trails or whether or not we need to call on the rest of the Nation to aid us in that effort.

Mr. Speaker, I have got another project here. It was only \$60,000. Isn't that sad when we get to this place where we start talking about projects that are only thousands and thousands of dollars? When you are managing a \$3.8 trillion budget, Mr. Speaker, it is hard to keep track of the thousands. That is why we don't want a big Federal budget. We don't want to be in the business of wasting money.

\$60,000 went to a project called Ped Flag. Now, this is in a small downtown area out West, and there is a crosswalk going across the street, and folks are concerned about pedestrian safety. There are pedestrian tragedies every year in this country and every year in my community. We certainly want to do everything we can to stop them.

The \$60,000 Ped Flag program goes to each end of a crosswalk, and it puts yellow flags in big buckets on each end of the crosswalk, Mr. Speaker, so that, when you are prepared to walk across the street, you can grab one of these flags, and you can wave it as you cross the street.

The street is two lanes, but you can wave it as you cross those two lanes to make sure that drivers coming down that low speed limit thoroughfare don't run into you. I think that is fabulous. I like a good parade, Mr. Speaker, and I love waving flags.

My question to you is: With all of the challenges facing this Chamber—we have got Social Security that is going bankrupt; we have got Medicare that is going bankrupt; we live in a dangerous world with ISIS and Russia and Iran—is it the priority for the tax dollars that we have been entrusted with—really, that we have confiscated from the American people—to spend 60,000 of those tax dollars to have buckets of flags on both sides of a two-lane street so that pedestrians can wave them as they cross?

If folks love parades as much as I do, Mr. Speaker, that local community can put those flags in place. A Federal grant program is not necessary to do so.

I have got an article here, Mr. Speaker, from just last month. It is talking about this program that allows these grant dollars to go out for all of these non-high-priority Federal purposes. They cite a \$112,000 grant for a white squirrel sanctuary.

Mr. Speaker, I have nothing against white squirrels. I will slow down when I am driving as the gray squirrels in my community cross the street, but I have no interest in confiscating Federal tax dollars that were intended to maintain a critically important national highway infrastructure and having a local community who views that as free money spend it to create a white squirrel sanctuary.

Mr. Speaker, these dollars are going to build boardwalks in our beach communities. They are going to resurface bike trails. They are even going to buy driving simulators at car museums because that is kind of peripherally related to transportation.

In my day, Mr. Speaker, it was just that Atari 2600 on which you could do the night driving program. Today, we can spend 198,000 Federal gas tax dollars to buy driving simulators to go into museums so that, when folks come by—after they have driven on the ratty roads that were unmaintained to get to the museum—they can have a wonderful driving experience inside the federally taxpayer paid simulator.

Mr. Speaker, I don't fault museums for wanting simulators. I don't fault communities for wanting bike trails. I don't fault communities for wanting flag-waving crosswalks. I fault this Congress for facing a fiscal challenge of: How do we complete our constitutional responsibility to maintain our roads and to even have the discussion of raising tax dollars before we have completed making the current accounts more effective, more efficient, and more accountable?

Mr. Speaker, I do not value Members who simply talk about everything that is wrong and who make no recommendations about how to fix it. We need to narrow the number of roads that qualify for Federal support. We need to prioritize what are those roads that fall into that constitutional responsibility and which ones, obviously, do not. Prioritize that spending. Take care of only those mission critical roads. Leave the rest to local communities.

Two, deal with our environmental regulations that are slowing needed construction, not abolish our environmental regulations, not ignore our environmental stewardship responsibilities, but recognize that advocates for the environment, advocates for the NEPA Act—as the mayor of Salt Lake City suggested, even those advocates realize we have gone far afield from what was intended as we have years of expense and delay for projects that we ought to be able to complete in a year and in 18 months. Let's streamline that. That is two.

Three, take all of these feel-good projects that every one of us has heard of in our districts—those projects that don't have anything to do with major national thoroughfares, those projects that don't have anything to do with our constitutional responsibility to maintain our interstate corridors—and abolish those altogether.

□ 1315

Mr. Speaker, they did a poll the other day amongst young people in this country. Young people, of course, when you get your first job at 16, you get that paycheck, you thought you were making \$8 an hour. It turns out after the government gets its share you are only making about \$5 an hour. We find

out we get lots of new voters when they get their first paycheck because folks realize the importance of having your voice heard.

The largest tax that 80 percent of American families pay, Mr. Speaker, is that payroll tax that is taken out of that paycheck before you even see it, that FICA line in your paycheck. The largest tax that 80 percent of American families pay, it goes to fund Social Security and Medicare; and yet in a recent poll among young people, more American young people believed they would see a UFO in their lifetime than believed they would see a Social Security check in their lifetime. Mr. Speaker, you cannot break promises to tax-payers in that way.

We have serious responsibilities in this Chamber. They do not include feel-good projects in local communities. They do not include squirrel sanctuaries, flag-waving projects, and boardwalk resurfacings. What they include is maintaining those mission-critical interstate corridors.

As we gather together to reauthorize the surface transportation bill, as we gather together to sort out the diminishing value of the highway trust fund, let us come together to restore some of that faith with the American taxpayer that we will be accountable, that we will be efficient, and that we will be effective in the use of every one of their taxpayer dollars. We cannot ask them for more until we have proven to them that we have used responsibly what they sent to us yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, we have talked transportation on the surface level. I want to briefly talk transportation at a port level.

I mentioned the port of Savannah, Mr. Speaker, that fastest growing container port in the world. You can't see it here on the map, but I have got one of those container ships coming into the port of Savannah, just loaded full. These giant cranes, it is amazing how quickly they can load and unload these giant container ships.

Funding for these kind of nationally important projects, these kind of projects that deliver value to the American taxpayer, that allow them to get the goods and products that they want from around the globe into their local markets for a lower cost—we are dredging the Savannah River right now in order to expand the Savannah harbor, this port, so that it can handle the New Panamax ships that are going to come through the new Panama Canal. These ships are giant, Mr. Speaker. If you haven't been to see them, you should take a look. They can bring in the order of three times more cargo in one ship. When you are taking a multiweek voyage across the Pacific Ocean, that is a big deal.

This project is going to cost \$706 million, and it will benefit the entire eastern seaboard in greater value and lower costs. But it is going to benefit Georgia more than it is going to benefit most places. Why? Because we are going to

have workers there, because our rest stops are going to be full, because our gasoline stations are going to be full. So the State of Georgia, even though this is a nationally significant project, is funding 40 percent of it out of our local coffers. We believe it is important to put your money where your mouth is.

Thinking about those delays that run up costs, we first started talking about doing this in the late 1990s, Mr. Speaker. We finally got Federal approval to begin last year. This was not a \$700 million project 17 years ago when we wanted to begin it, but we couldn't begin it 17 years ago. We have only been able to begin it now. About \$100 million is going to go out the door, Mr. Speaker, to get this project under way. If all goes well, we can finish this in about 5 years, but we are going to have to have that Federal-State partnership. For these projects that are not uniquely Federal, for these projects that are not uniquely State, we need both entities putting skin in the game to make these projects successful.

Mr. Speaker, what we are talking about is about \$100 million from the State coming this year, about \$100 million from the Feds coming next year. What I want to ask my colleagues, as we talk about how to prioritize funding, how can we get together to squeeze out those projects that are of local import—and leave those to local dollars and local concerns—and include these projects that are of national import to make sure we get them done on time and under budget?

Mr. Speaker, back-of-the-envelope calculating that folks doing the construction at the port have done tell us that it is about \$174 million annually in lost benefits as this project is delayed—lost benefits on the one hand, added costs on the other. I am always skeptical when somebody says: ROB, if you will only spend \$1 on this project, I will get you \$18 in return. I say: Good news. We have got an \$18 trillion Federal debt. Let me give you \$1 trillion for your project this year; you can give me back \$18 trillion next year.

A lot of funny numbers go on in this Washington, D.C., math game that folks play.

But, undeniably, if we cannot compete at a local level, if American products begin to cost more to export relative to their foreign competitors because we can't handle the big Panamax ships, American workers will lose; American consumers will lose. These are national priorities that bring people together.

I want to set expectations, Mr. Speaker, on how we are going to get this done. Again, I want to go back. 1996 was when we first had this conversation, completed the very first study of getting this done; the very first conditional approval at the Federal level, 1999. In 2012, folks finally made the decision; South Carolina and Georgia sorted out their issues in May of 2013; final project permits came out

in July of 2013; State of Georgia, Johnny on the spot, funding it with \$266 million. Another round of bond initiatives will go out this summer.

Mr. Speaker, 2019 is when this project is expected to be done. A project that could have started in 1997, a project that could have been done by 2003, a project that could have been a nation-leading project so that American goods could get out to the world in a competitive way as the new Panama Canal comes on line for us to be ready to go as a nation, what could have been a story of planning ahead and of success has become a story of decades-long delay and being behind.

Mr. Speaker, those are not academic conversations. Those are conversations that are represented with dollars and cents. It is American jobs lost; it is American productivity lost; it is international competitiveness lost. Item after item after item after item. We are in the midst of a surface transportation reauthorization bill and our highway trust fund; we are in the midst of an FAA reauthorization bill and our aviation funding mechanisms. Hopefully, we will be back to a water resources development bill again, as we were last year, dealing with developing our water resources.

The question in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, is never will we be involved in generating American productivity or will we not. The question is we will be involved, but on what and how. Let us move these low-priority projects off of the Federal budget, off of the Federal taxpayer, and back into local hands, where they can be accomplished more quickly and more efficiently at a lower dollar cost. Before we decide to raise taxes on the American people, let us ensure that every single dollar that we raise today is giving a dollar's worth of value for a dollar's worth of tax.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. We have big things in store for this year. They will be collaborative things. These are not Republican concerns; these are not Democratic concerns; these are American concerns. These are concerns of America's most deliberative and engaging body, the United States House of Representatives.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

UPLIFTING STORIES FROM THE CINCINNATI AREA

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ROUZER). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. CHABOT) for 30 minutes.

Mr. CHABOT. I will not take that much time.

Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a lot of bad news these days and negative stories, but I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some uplifting stories from the Cincinnati area, the area that I happen to represent here in the United States Congress.

First, I would like to congratulate a Cincinnati broadcasting legend on a storied career. A week from tomorrow, Friday, April 3, Cincinnati will say good-bye to a longtime morning show host, Jim Scott, who is retiring after 47 years on the radio in Cincinnati.

Over the years, Mr. Scott has been synonymous with mornings, as hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Cincinnatians started their day listening to him cover the topics of the day. From politics and local news to entertainment and sports, Jim Scott covered every story in a style uniquely his own. His excellence was recognized back in 2002 when he won the Marconi Award for large market personality of the year.

Jim Scott has also been a pillar of the community, helping out with numerous charities and community service organizations, activities I am sure that he will continue. He has become a staple of the opening day parade for the Cincinnati Reds, who I hope have a great year this year.

I want to congratulate Jim Scott on his retirement and his outstanding career. Mornings in Cincinnati will not be the same without him.

Mr. Speaker, Cincinnati has also been blessed by the inspiring stories of two young ladies battling pediatric cancer, and I would like to take a moment to thank each of them for the example that they have provided and the hope that they have given to millions.

First, I would like to talk about Lauren Hill. For those who haven't heard Lauren's story, there really aren't words to describe her courage and resiliency in the face of insurmountable odds. Lauren loves to play basketball, a sport she had planned to play throughout her college years at Mount St. Joseph University. Unfortunately, Lauren was diagnosed with a rare form of inoperable, terminal brain cancer, DIPG, and doctors really weren't sure how long she would live.

For most people, the story would end there, but not for Lauren. She was determined to play in a college basketball game, and back on November 2, she joined her teammates on the court, and in front of a sold-out crowd at Xavier University's Cintas Center, she scored the opening basket.

That wasn't enough for Lauren. She also wanted to dedicate her remaining time to raising awareness of pediatric cancer. Through Layup 4 Lauren and other charitable efforts, she has helped raise over \$1 million for research to combat pediatric cancer.

Mr. Speaker, I like to believe that each one of us is put on this Earth for a reason, and it is clear to me that Lauren's purpose was to inspire a city and a nation and to raise awareness for a terrible disease, a purpose she has fulfilled with a dignity and grace that is an inspiration to me and countless others. I am deeply grateful for Lauren's spirit and the example that she has provided for our community and for our Nation.

□ 1330

Our thoughts and prayers are with Lauren and her family.

But Lauren is not the only young lady with Cincinnati ties inspiring our Nation. We have also been blessed to learn the story of Leah Still, the 4-year-old daughter of Cincinnati Bengals' defensive lineman Devon Still.

Last year, Leah was also diagnosed with a rare form of pediatric cancer. Faced with this devastating news, Devon Still was determined to help his little girl in whatever way he could. Part of his effort was to use their story to help raise money to combat pediatric cancer and give hope to other families facing the same struggle they were.

The Cincinnati Bengals and the NFL joined Mr. Still in his efforts by agreeing to donate the proceeds of sales of Devon's number 75 Bengals jersey to Cincinnati Children's Hospital, which, by the way, is the number one children's hospital in the Nation in combating pediatric cancer. Together, they also raised over \$1 million for pediatric cancer research.

While that is certainly great news, the story has an even happier ending. Yesterday, I, along with millions of others, was thrilled to learn that Leah's cancer was in remission.

Leah still has treatments ahead of her, and she should remain in our thoughts and prayers. But that was wonderful news, and a reason to be grateful.

May God bless all three of the remarkable people that I have just talked about.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) for 30 minutes.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to address this. The bill we passed today is something that needed to be addressed. It was a problem that has been growing for about 16 years, or so.

The cut that was put into law has been changed 17 times in the last 16 or so years. It made cuts to healthcare providers. We have caused some healthcare providers to retire early.

It was \$716 billion that ObamaCare took from Medicare in order to, supposedly, fund 30 million or so that we were told didn't have insurance. Now we have cost millions their health insurance policy they liked. And I say "we." Not a single Republican voted for that bill. It has cost Americans, millions of Americans, the doctor that they wanted to use.

We have seen promise after promise that was made about ObamaCare that was broken. It absolutely wasn't true. Then we find out that there were advisers around the White House who were