

During the Great Recession, Governors, both Republicans and Democrats, in 46 States have requested and have been granted some type of waiver from the 3-month time limit. This enabled unemployed adults to continue to look for a job in a tough job market without going hungry.

Mr. Speaker, our economy continues to improve and unemployment rates across the country are falling, but we are not out of the woods yet. The most vulnerable among us—those with limited education and skills—continue to struggle to find work.

In October 2014, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimated there were two unemployed workers for every available position. By that measure, even if every available job were filled by an unemployed individual, there still would not be enough jobs for everyone who needed one.

When the current 3-month time limit waivers expire, the problem is that most States offer few, if any, job training programs. They aren't required to do so. And in States that do offer work programs, the number of individuals who need them far outnumbers the available slots. Come 2016, an unemployed adult actively looking for work, no matter how many job postings they respond to or how many resumes they send out, will arbitrarily be cut off from receiving food benefits through no fault of their own.

The 3-month time limit as it is drafted is a severe penalty that hurts an already vulnerable population. According to USDA data, those who would be affected have an average monthly income of only 19 percent of the poverty line. They often do not qualify for any other types of assistance.

Mr. Speaker, it is unconscionable that 1 million of the poorest Americans would be cut off from food benefits because their State does not offer job training programs or does not have the capacity to meet the demand for those who need help improving their skills. These individuals would be left on their own at an already difficult time. They may be forced to choose between food and rent or other necessities.

Mr. Speaker, we need to adequately fund our job training programs, which this Congress has consistently failed to do, and we need to ensure that unemployed adults who are diligently searching for a job do not go hungry while they look for work.

I am concerned—deeply concerned—about reports that Republican leaders want to launch yet another assault against SNAP. They want to cut the program even more. That would be a mistake and a disservice to one of the most efficiently and effectively run Federal programs. Even more important, it would be a disservice to so many of our citizens who are struggling in poverty.

Mr. Speaker, I am also concerned about a Republican majority that is more interested in adhering to a political sound bite than in pursuing sound

policy. Let's focus on ending hunger and ending poverty. Let's bring to an end the nasty, cruel, and negative rhetoric that has been used to demagogue SNAP and those who rely on the benefit that was so evident in the last Congress.

Mr. Speaker, it is tough to be poor in America. It is hard work. We in Congress should be part of the solution, not part of the problem. We can do better. We can and we should do more to end hunger now.

IN THE LINE OF DUTY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. AL GREEN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. AL GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that I stand at the podium today to thank two Members of Congress who last week took the lead on LEAD. LEAD is Law Enforcement Appreciation Day. I want to thank Congresspersons JOLLY and REICHERT for what they did on last Friday in paying a special tribute, if you will, to the 900,000-plus who serve us as peace officers in the United States of America.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to say that in my family I had an uncle who was a peace officer, and he had an influence on my life that literally changed the course of my life and set me on the course that I currently am pursuing. My uncle and I were riding along together, and I was asking a lot of questions. He made a statement that became indelible with me. He said: This boy is asking so many questions, I think he is going to be a lawyer.

I was younger than 10. I don't think I knew what a lawyer was. I am not sure how old I was. I remember I was very young. But I also remember that if my uncle thought that being a lawyer was a good thing for me, then that was a thing that I should do.

This was a peace officer, a police officer, a deputy sheriff that had a lasting impact on my life. I am so grateful for his service to his community and the way he has been an outstanding citizen in his community. His name is Dallas Yates.

I am proud to tell you that when I saw these Congresspersons paying tribute to peace officers, police officers, I concluded that I would have to add to the RECORD some thoughts because there is a phrase that we use quite often when we reference peace officers. It is styled, "in the line of duty"—"in the line of duty." And officers do so many things in the line of duty. Some of these things, quite frankly, are not things that they are expected to do, but they do them anyway.

The Washington Post reported that two officers delivered a baby on Christmas Day in the line of duty. They were on duty when they did it. Officers are not trained to deliver babies, but when called upon, they take the lead to do what needs to be done.

Think of the thousands of people who have been stranded and who were

helped by peace officers: flood victims helped by peace officers, persons with something as simple as a flat tire helped by police officers, all in the course and scope of their duty. And then, of course, we have officers who have literally gone into fires to save lives. It has been reported that officers have done this. In fact, the Tulsa World recently reported that an officer saved a life from a fire in the line of duty, in the course and scope of duty.

That phrase means a lot more than simply lending a helping hand. "In the line of duty" means sometimes that officers lose their lives. In this country, we had 27 officers die in 2013 as a result of felonious incidents all occurring in the line of duty. We had 49 that died from accidents in the line of duty.

Mr. Speaker, when this term is used now, "in the line of duty," to refer to these officers who make the ultimate sacrifice so that others may have a better life, you have better appreciation for what "in the line of duty" means. It is more than mere words. It means sacrifice. Many families have had to mourn the loss of a loved one in the line of duty.

So I am proud to salute the officers—the 900,000-plus—and I thank the Congresspersons who led the discussion celebrating, appreciating, and commemorating those who have served and have gone on to make their transition in the line of duty.

I think it appropriate to close with these words that express some thoughts about how we measure our lives and how the life of a person is measured and appreciated. Ruth Smeltzer reminds us:

Some measure their lives by days and years,
Others by heartthrobs, passion, and tears.
But the surest measure under the sun
Is what in your lifetime for others you have
done.

I want to thank the 900,000-plus officers for what they have done for others in their lifetime in the line of duty. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

THE GAS TAX

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, the momentum for an increase in the Federal gas tax continues to build. This weekend's excellent New York Times editorial made the case why the increase is needed and long overdue. Costs of repair increase dramatically the longer they are delayed. In the meantime, Americans paid billions of dollars for congestion, wasted gas, and repairing damage to their cars, and thousands of lives are lost due to unsafe roads. This followed an editorial in The Washington Post making the same argument, joining USA Today, L.A. Times, and a variety of newspapers across the country.

Recently, we have seen eight Senators from both parties who have been

identified as stepping up, either supporting a gas tax or at least being open to it. We have seen leadership at the State level as eight States in the last 2 years have increased gas taxes, including some very red States like Wyoming and New Hampshire. Here in the House, there are already 136 Members who have signed a bipartisan letter urging the leadership to act on providing appropriate funding that is sustainable and dedicated.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have a solution. This issue has been studied extensively, including two Presidential commissions during the Bush administration. The conclusion was that there is no better, more effective solution than simply raising the gas tax, which hasn't been increased in 22 years.

People know America is falling behind as it is falling apart. The concern about the financial impact of a gas tax increase on families is waning. As gas prices plummet, my corner gas station is selling gasoline at \$1.60 per gallon less than its peak last year.

I will be reintroducing the funding proposal I had in the last Congress. That legislation was widely supported by a range of interests that included labor, business, the professions, local government, transit, environmentalists, truckers, AAA, and cyclists. They all agreed that there is a critical need to fund investments in rebuilding and renewing America.

Mr. Speaker, the arguments today are basically the same that were used by President Ronald Reagan in his Thanksgiving Day address in 1982. He used his nationwide radio speech 33 years ago to call for an increase that more than doubled the Federal gas tax. He pointed out that that tax is actually for the people who benefit from using it, that the user fee would cost less than the damage to repair their cars from damage due to poor conditions from roads and bridges. As President Reagan said, it would probably be less than a pair of shock absorbers.

He pointed out that the gas tax then, as now, had not been raised in more than two decades, and that repairing infrastructure that was failing would put hundreds of thousands of people to work while it protected the investment in our infrastructure as well as in our automobiles.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for Congress to step up. The States are doing their part. People are exploring innovative financing approaches involving the private sector. People are looking at creative ways to design and build projects, but there is no substitute for the 25 percent of infrastructure funding that comes from the Federal partnership. It is absolutely essential for projects that are multiyear, projects that are multimodal and that involve a number of jurisdictions, often a number of States.

This May we face the expiration of the short-term highway trust fund fix from last summer. We are back in the exact same situation we were then.

Failing to address the funding issue head-on has meant that we haven't had a 6-year reauthorization approved by Congress since 1997. Since then, we have had two ever-shorter reauthorizations and 21 temporary extensions. Over \$60 billion of general fund money has been needed to just prop up our inadequate system.

□ 1030

Mr. Speaker, no country has become great planning and building its infrastructure 6 months at a time. It is time to capitalize on falling oil prices, on the momentum that is building around the country, and the realization that we need to act now.

I strongly urge my colleagues to join me and, indeed, President Reagan in this long overdue action. America will be better off, the economy will be stronger, communities will be more livable and our families safer, healthier, and more economically secure.

STRENGTH OF THE PUERTO RICO STATEHOOD MOVEMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. PIERLUISI) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Speaker, last week I spoke about Puerto Rico's mission to discard its status as a U.S. territory and to become a U.S. State. Today, I rise to inform my colleagues about the most recent phase of this mission.

A brief word of background. Puerto Rico has been a territory since 1898. Its status is incompatible with the principles this Nation strives to uphold at home and promotes abroad. There are 3.6 million American citizens in Puerto Rico. My constituents cherish their U.S. citizenship and have made countless contributions to this country in law, science, business, government, the arts, the armed services, and every other field of human endeavor. Yet they cannot vote for President, have no U.S. Senators, and send one Delegate to the House who has a voice but no vote in this Chamber.

The people of Puerto Rico, beyond lacking democratic rights, are deprived of equality under law. Congress has a license to discriminate against the territories, and Puerto Rico is treated worse than the States under a range of Federal programs. To compensate for the shortfall in Federal funding, the Puerto Rican government has borrowed heavily in order to provide adequate public services. This disparate treatment is the principal reason why Puerto Rico has endured severe economic problems for decades.

Inequality, both political and economic, is driving thousands of my constituents to depart for the States every month. It is human nature to go where you believe you can secure a better future for yourself and your family. However, residents of Puerto Rico have fi-

nally said enough is enough. They demand a status that is democratic and dignified, a proud status for a proud people.

In a referendum organized by the local government in 2012, voters in Puerto Rico rejected territory status and expressed a clear preference for statehood. In response, Congress provided an appropriation of \$2.5 million to fund the first federally sponsored vote in Puerto Rico's history, with the clear goal of resolving the territory's status. This is the most significant step the Federal Government has ever taken to settle the status debate in Puerto Rico.

I have proposed that the funding be used to hold a federally sponsored "yes" or "no" vote on whether Puerto Rico should be admitted as a State. Some have complained that Puerto Rico has already voted for statehood and should not have to vote again. This argument is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of history and how Washington works. After expressing a strong desire for statehood in local referenda, the territories of Alaska and Hawaii each held federally sponsored "yes" or "no" votes on admission that led to statehood. If Puerto Rico wants to become a State, it must do the same.

My proposal has broad congressional support, since a bill I filed last Congress that endorsed this approach obtained 131 cosponsors and led to the filing of an identical Senate bill. My proposal also has significant local support. Yesterday, in a remarkable display of unity and resolve, all 22 members of the statehood delegation in the Puerto Rico house and all eight members of the statehood delegation in the Puerto Rico Senate introduced identical bills that proposed to use the appropriation from Congress to conduct a federally sponsored vote on Puerto Rico's admission as a State. Now all that remains is for Puerto Rico's Governor, speaker of the house, and senate president—each a defender of the failed status quo—to show some courage and schedule this vote. Real leaders do not fear the democratic process or its results.

Meanwhile, statehood forces continue our forward march, expanding in size and strength. Indeed, today statehood supporters are rallying outside the White House and are holding meetings here in Congress. In the coming weeks and months, our advocacy efforts will only intensify. As individuals, our ability to effect change is inherently limited, but as a united movement, we are as strong as steel. We are fighting for equality, and we will not stop until we achieve it.

OPPOSING THE REPUBLICAN AGENDA

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

Mr. ELLISON. Mr. Speaker, this Congress is still very young. This Congress