

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.

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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

that we are in right now began last week when we were gaveled in and we were sworn in. It has taken very little time for my Republican colleagues to begin to message to the American people just where they stand.

The things we have seen last week from the very beginning—one thing we saw was an effort in the rules package which prohibited Social Security from sending money over to the Social Security disability fund. This has been done many times before; it is routine. It will certainly create pressure and undermine and create real damage and a scary situation for people who are on Social Security disability payments and who survive on it based on their documented, recorded illness.

But they didn't stop there. The very next day they began to erode the financial protections that protect Americans from the massive collapse that took place on Wall Street in 2008. Already they want to dismantle and chip away at the Volcker rule, a very commonsense rule which says that big banks that hold collateralized loan obligations have to move these big assets, these big financial instruments, outside of their banking business, wherein they have protected assets by the FDIC.

No sooner than we did that, the very next day we moved on to dismantling the Affordable Care Act, making it so you don't get health care coverage, can't mandate health care coverage until someone works 40 hours, as opposed to 30, which meant that there will be people who will lose out on health care coverage from their employer.

And the next day, we were here with the Keystone pipeline. They tried to push that under a bill that wasn't really a pure Keystone bill. It didn't have things like spill protection.

And then here we are this week about to see a bill on the floor very soon which will essentially prioritize Republican gamesmanship over immigration. It will prioritize that over our homeland security. The Homeland Security bill, this bill we passed last year, late last year—you may recall something called the CR/Omnibus bill. It was a CR omnibus bill. We passed a whole series of funding bills for a year's time, except for one particular bill. And the bill that is due to expire is the Homeland Security bill.

Now in the wake of Paris happening just a few days ago, the horrific murder, carnage, and barbaric behavior by terrorists that happened just a few days ago, we now are facing a big fight on what of all things—homeland security? And why are we having this big fight? It's because the Republicans want to show President Obama that they are not going to allow him to use executive authority that is well within his power to do.

Presidents have always used executive authority. The Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Lincoln was executive authority. The bills

that Ronald Reagan passed used executive authority many more times than President Obama has. So has George W. Bush. It is routine. Presidents issue executive orders.

President Obama has done some because the Republican majority has refused to move on comprehensive immigration reform. He has used his authority to prioritize the deportation of criminals, people who have committed crimes, over kids who are valedictorians, and he has done this well within his right as the chief executive officer of this country.

And because the Republicans don't like the executive orders, because they have very divisive views, in my opinion, on immigration, they have decided to have a very short Homeland Security funding bill, which is putting us in a position where we are either going to capitulate and back off on things that the President wants to do or we are going to pass a Homeland Security bill with a lot of things in it that would be damaging to the action that the President has already taken.

Let me tell you, some of the things in the Homeland Security bill are of huge concern to me. I will just share just a few of them. One of them is the Blackburn amendment. The Blackburn amendment would prohibit the use of funds to continue for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.

Pay close attention to this bill. This is not what the American people want. We urge the American people to pay close attention, and I intend to vote against these Republican measures.

TERRORISM AROUND THE WORLD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, the new year has come with many blessings, but it has also come with a major wake-up call. I rise again to express my deepest sympathy to the people of France, the loss of lives, including our Jewish brothers and sisters targeted simply because of their faith and other innocents.

I stand as well to recognize my friends in the Muslim community who have all come together, to thank them for standing against violent and reckless terrorism. Their voices were loud and present and noted.

I recognize the heads of state, the work of the United States in standing alongside France, our early and longstanding partner in democracy and liberty. Yesterday, some of us had the privilege, hosted by the Foreign Affairs Committee, to greet the French Ambassador and to offer to the people of France our personal regrets and sympathy.

As we look to the incidents that are coming to our attention around the world, let me bring up again the girls in Nigeria, who were taken almost a year ago, 300 innocent school girls. The only thing that they wanted to do was to take their exams.

In the spring of 2014, I led a delegation of Members of Congress to the northern state of Borno. I met the pleading and crying and broken families. I met some of the girls who gave a harrowing story of how they escaped, sliding through the wooded forests, escaping for their lives with just the clothes on their back. Only through a light from a house along the road were they able to get some refuge, and then three of them escaped on a motorcycle with a hero whose name probably will never be noted.

But these girls have no more identity. We are saying bring the girls back, but maybe they are married and impregnated and indoctrinated in this instance with doctrines that were not their life. They were Christian.

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The focus on Africa must be enhanced. I thank my good friend Congresswoman KAREN BASS, who has been working tirelessly as the ranking member of the Africa Subcommittee and had a brilliant meeting this morning.

I come now to announce that we cannot stand by as Boko Haram pillages violently, recklessly, with inhumanity, kills with reckless abandonment, with no one stopping them, 2,000 people along Lake Chad, bodies that people are tripping over and finding under bushes and trees. This is a cry for mercy; this is an outrage. The world cannot stand by idly and not look to this.

Nigeria cannot fight this alone, and just as we have announced a concerted global effort against ISIL and al Qaeda, we must do this against Boko Haram. They are not simply a group of thugs. They have connected to this vile institution of terrorism, and they are going up against ill-prepared military forces.

We could point the finger, and I am asking for the Government of Nigeria to stand and ask for help. There is no shame in asking for help. I am asking the United Nations to do more than it is doing. I am asking the African Union to collaborate with the forces that they have at their side with the collaboration of African countries to go to the rescue of the innocent persons in northern Nigeria.

How can we stand by when a 10-year-old girl who needs to be playing with dolls and going to school and looking into the sunshine for an aspirational light of things that she can do in 2014, probably a brilliant little girl, unbeknownst to her, strapped with a horrible bomb and now in death, with her little body splintered by a bomb—a suicide bomber—how can she even understand what they had told her she was doing?

Mr. Speaker, let me close by saying that I am calling upon the world to join in a global effort to fight the terrorist dastardly behavior of an uncaring Boko Haram, and I close by saying that we must reach out to young Muslim boys in northern Nigeria for an alternative to that life.