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House of Representatives

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

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
May 19, 2015.

I hereby appoint the Honorable MIKE BOST 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 6, 2015, 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.

WASTE, FRAUD, AND ABUSE IN AFGHANISTAN

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

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, last week, The Washington Post ran a story titled, “Defense Firm that Employed Drunk, High Contractors in Afghanistan May Have Wasted \$135 Million in Taxpayer Dollars,” by Colby Itkowitz. Colby writes:

“The defense contractor investigated in 2012 after cellphone videos surfaced of its employees drunk and high on drugs in Afghanistan may have mis-

used almost \$135 million of U.S. taxpayer money, an audit finds.”

The Hill further reported that:

“The company also did not comply with Federal procurement law, the audit found.”

Mr. Speaker, I have been coming down to this floor for weeks to highlight the waste, fraud, and abuse in Afghanistan, which John Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, has reported is worse now than ever.

The National Defense Authorization Act, which the House passed last week, authorized \$42 billion for Afghanistan, which is one of the reasons I did not vote for the bill.

Why do we continue to spend billions of American taxpayer dollars in Afghanistan when infrastructure all over the United States is rapidly deteriorating? This past weekend, CBS’ “60 Minutes” ran a segment on America’s failing infrastructure and reported that 70,000 bridges in the United States have been deemed structurally deficient, according to the Federal Government. That is one bridge out of every nine. My constituents in eastern North Carolina continually experience frustration and concern over the Bonner Bridge, which is falling apart. This further highlights the waste and the failed policy in Afghanistan.

I know some Members of Congress will be upset that I am calling attention to the reckless spending in Afghanistan the NDAA authorized, but then why doesn’t Congress stop sending billions of dollars to a failed state where young American men and women are being wounded and killed? Mr. Speaker, this includes the father of these two little girls who are on a poster beside me. Their names are Eden and Stephanie Balduf. Their daddy, Sergeant Kevin Balduf, was shot and killed in Afghanistan 2 years ago by the Afghan he was training.

Mr. Speaker, it just gets worse and worse. Those wasted billions of dollars

should be allocated to fix American bridges and roads from falling apart and endangering American citizens. It is the right thing to do.

Mr. Speaker, let me remind the American people that, last year, the Obama administration signed a 10-year bilateral security agreement with Afghanistan strapping us with 10 more years of waste, fraud, and abuse; 10 more years of billions of dollars being wasted; 10 more years of young Americans being killed and wounded while the infrastructure in America is collapsing; 10 more years of veterans worrying about their benefits. There are so many needs here in America, so many needs that are not being met because we are wasting money overseas in Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, Congress should debate and vote to stop the madness in Afghanistan on behalf of our soldiers and our men and women in uniform, their families, and the taxpayers of America.

Mr. Speaker, it has been said many times that Afghanistan is a graveyard of empires. I hope there is a headstone for America because that is where we are heading, to the graveyard in Afghanistan.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, after a rocky start this Congress, we have seen some signs of progress.

Earlier this session, the House leadership allowed the process to work when all Democrats joined many Republicans to rescue Homeland Security from the potential disastrous shutdown by cutting off funds.

Later, a decade-long struggle on the Medicare sustainable growth rate, the so-called doc fix, moved forward. An impasse that had lasted for years was

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broken, and the solution was overwhelmingly approved by Members of both parties.

Well, now, we are facing yet another impasse, one that has haunted us far longer than a decade, transportation funding. The authority to spend for surface transportation programs expires May 31.

Just as I predicted last summer, the stopgap approach that we approved then would put us right back in the same spot this spring, cutting badly needed transportation projects this summer and the jobs that go with them.

America is falling apart and falling behind in part because you cannot pay for 2015 transportation needs with 1993 dollars, which was the last time we raised the gas tax. Thirty-two short-term funding extensions are evidence of a bipartisan failure for these 22 years to deal with the gas tax, and there is no meaningful alternative for transportation resources on the horizon.

Ironically, the solution is clear, thoroughly studied and broadly supported: raise the gas tax for the first time since 1993. The House Republican leadership doesn't have to do anything extraordinary, just allow the Ways and Means Committee to follow regular order. Let's listen to the experts; invite the stakeholders that build, maintain, and use our transportation system.

Listen to the heads of the AFL-CIO, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, leaders in transit, truckers, AAA, bicyclists, all of whom agree with President Eisenhower, who used the gas tax to start the highway trust fund and the interstate freeway system, and President Ronald Reagan, who increased gas tax a nickel, more than doubling it in 1992.

In fact, we can invite legislators from today. Six red Republican States have raised the gas tax already this year: Nebraska, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Utah, and South Dakota. State Senator Michael Vehle comes to mind.

The key is to have real hearings, like Congress used to conduct. Have a full week devoted to solving the transportation funding crisis. Bring in the witnesses, grill them, test their thoughts and theories, discuss real solutions, not gimmicks or ideologically driven fantasies.

Let's have serious work sessions and a markup. President Obama could help by establishing a marker that he will approve no further extensions past September 31.

It will not be less complex, expensive, or easier politically in 2016, 2017, or 2018. If this slides until 2016, which is the approach evidently favored by the Republican leadership, we will be struggling with this in the next Congress and the next administration.

This does not have to be an exercise in futility. We are seeing the leadership exhibited all across the country with 20 States that have stepped up, and as I mentioned, six red States already this year.

Now is the time for Congress to do its job. In fact, if we do our job, taking the solution that has been thoroughly vetted, studied, and widely supported by interest groups across the political spectrum, we are going to be able to solve this funding conundrum.

We will be able to rebuild and renew America, putting hundreds of thousands of people to work at family-wage jobs, while Congress helps make our families safer, healthier, and more economically secure.

I strongly urge that the House reject the approach that would simply dodge this problem for 2 more months, then slide to the end of the year and beyond. We should call the question now, establish the parameters.

This is something that is long overdue, that all of us can embrace, and America will be the better for it.

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

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

Mr. HOLDING. Mr. Speaker, the challenges we face today are different from the challenges we faced when Mental Health Awareness Month began decades ago, but now, it is more important than ever that we take time out of our busy schedules to speak about the prevalence of mental illness and understand the importance, as friends, as family members, and as a community, of discussing the common signs of mental illness.

Mr. Speaker, you may be surprised to learn, as I was, that 1 in 5 adults experience mental health problems each year; and, while each illness is unique, there are some common signs that you or a loved one could be suffering from mental illness, like difficulty concentrating or experiencing a change in sleeping habits.

As parents, we must make an effort to talk to our children about their emotions and their mental health, just as we care for our children's physical health, by encouraging them to eat well, get enough sleep, and exercise frequently.

Without a doubt, Mr. Speaker, America is one of the most blessed countries in the world. We are all offered the opportunities for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Raising healthy families, both physically and mentally, is one of the responsibilities that comes with those freedoms.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the more voices we have speaking up about mental health, the better we can eliminate stigma surrounding mental health conditions. The National Alliance on Mental Illness of North Carolina is asking individuals in my home State, North Carolina, to see the person and not the illness and pledge to be stigma-free.

It is time to end the silence and stigma often linked with mental health conditions, and I join them happily in this effort.

CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF B.B. KING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. DAVID SCOTT) for 5 minutes.

Mr. DAVID SCOTT of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, ladies and gentlemen, B.B. King, a musical genius, has passed away.

When B.B. King was just a little boy down in Indianola, Mississippi, he stood up in the middle of a cotton field, and he said:

One day, somebody is going to stand up and sing about me and play the guitar about me.

Then he said:

You know, I reckon it will be myself. Yeah, I reckon it will be me.

B.B. King went on to become a worldwide icon of music; and people all over the world, regardless of race, creed, or color, appreciated and loved B.B. King. B.B. King influenced all the great ones, from Frank Sinatra to Elvis Presley; and Elvis Presley loved B.B. King.

Aretha Franklin, Sam Cook, Eric Clapton, Mick Jagger, even the Beatles and Muddy Waters, Bo Diddley, all of these musical legends were influenced by B.B. King.

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B.B. King sung about the deep things of life. He sung about love—love lost and love gained. B.B. King sang, and he played the blues. A unique American cultural, musical genre, B.B. King.

Ladies and gentlemen, you know, B.B. King would say:

Trouble in mind, I'm blue
But I won't be blue always
'Cause I know the sun's gonna shine in my
back door someday
I am all alone at midnight, and the lights are
burning low
But the sun's gonna shine in my back door
someday.

Mr. Speaker, the great classic of so many classics that he wrote and he sang was "The Thrill is Gone." As he would say, "The thrill is gone away." But, Mr. Speaker, the thrill of B.B. King and his life and his music and his great contributions as a genuine American hero will live on and on for generations to come. B.B. King's music will live on, and Lucille, his guitar, will live on.

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Speaker, we thank God, Jehovah God Almighty, for sending B.B. King our way.

IRAN

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

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. Speaker, a large and respected Iranian expatriate community has settled in California, and it has been my privilege to get to know some of them in recent years. They are part of an international diaspora of 5 million people who fled Iran after it fell to Islamic fascism 36 years