



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 114th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 161

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 2015

No. 88

House of Representatives

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

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
June 3, 2015.

I hereby appoint the Honorable GARRET GRAVES 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.

HONORING BRENT WINN LAYTON

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

Mr. DENHAM. Mr. Speaker, today, I rise to acknowledge and honor the life of a personal friend and Gold Star Father Brent Winn Layton. The beloved father, son, brother, and uncle died unexpectedly at the age of 47 on Saturday, May 23, 2015, in Longmont, Colorado.

Brent was born on October 23, 1967, in Berkeley, California, to Shirley Hughes and A. Winn Layton. Although Brent lived in many cities throughout his

life, he was a longtime resident of the Escalon area and considered it home.

Brent was a very gifted man with many levels. He served as a deputy sheriff in Kern County, California, and Clark County, Arkansas. He also served as a peace officer for the Escalon Police Department. In addition to his commitment to law enforcement, Brent was committed to God. He was a very spiritual man and found great comfort in his faith.

Unfortunately, in 2009, Brent became a Gold Star Father when his firstborn son, James, was killed in action in Kunar province, Afghanistan, serving during Operation Enduring Freedom. Since then, Brent's mission in life was to embrace other Gold Star families and help them through the grieving process.

Brent had many friends that loved him, and he had a heart full of love for them. His laugh, his sense of humor, and his big bear hugs will be missed forever. In addition, his friends and family admired his honest pride in his Cherokee Nation citizenship and will miss listening to him play guitar. There is peace in knowing that he is now with his son as well as the family and friends that have gone before him.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in honoring and recognizing Brent for his friendship, faith, and unwavering support for other military families. He had a genuine love for people, community, and country and will be missed by many. God bless him always.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, this week, we started the 33rd extension of the highway spending program. The 33rd time that we failed to deal meaningfully with the crisis in funding

our transportation system. It is a symbol of Congress' failure to deal with a country that is falling apart and falling behind.

No country became great building its infrastructure 7 months at a time.

It prompts silly ideas. One recently, an op-ed page of The Wall Street Journal, talks about "Taxing for Highways, Paying for Bike Lanes" as the problem. Well, as is pointed out in letters to the editor today, it is not spending on bike paths which Dr. Pete Ruane, head of the American Road & Transportation Builders Association, pointed out is about 1 percent of the total Federal transportation highway budget, if you include sidewalks as well.

No, the problem is that we are paying for 2015 infrastructure with 1993 dollars. We have not raised the gas tax in 22 years. Now, I would suggest that what we ought to do is to look at the broad coalition that is represented by the authors on that page from the roadbuilders and the cyclists—they are representative of the broadest coalition on any issue in American politics today—from the AFL-CIO to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the truckers—represented eloquently by Governor Bill Graves, who is not just president of the American Trucking Associations, he was the Republican Governor of Kansas who raised the gas tax not once, but twice.

There is an opportunity for us to break the logjam. I would suggest that maybe the House Ways and Means Committee could, for the first time in the 55 months that the Republicans have been in charge, actually meet to discuss transportation funding. That is our job.

Let's dedicate an entire week to solving this problem. Let's invite in representatives of that broad coalition: people who build, maintain, and use our transportation system. Let's hear from the six Republican States that already this year have raised the gas tax,

This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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red Republican States: Utah; Georgia; South Dakota; Idaho; Iowa; and, most recently, Nebraska, where the legislature overrode the Governor's veto to raise their gas tax.

It is time for Congress to do its job and to be in partnership with those States who expect us to maintain the Federal responsibility. Let's hear from the broad array of people and then allow the Ways and Means Committee to follow regular order.

There is more support for raising the gas tax. The public is already paying the price. The bill I have, which would provide 210 billion additional dollars over the next decade, would cost the average motorist just about \$90 a year. At a time of declining gas prices, that is not that great, but motorists are now paying \$350 a year on average in damage to their cars. The country paid \$125 billion in the cost of congestion.

Let's stop beating around the bush. Let's pass the first 6-year transportation reauthorization, the first since 1998. The first step is for the Ways and Means Committee to do its job, bring these people in, work together on a bipartisan basis, raise the gas tax, index the gas tax, then abolish the gas tax, replace it with something that is sustainable.

In the meantime, let's rebuild and renew America and put hundreds of thousands of people to work at family-wage jobs while we strengthen communities from coast to coast.

HOLDING THE VA ACCOUNTABLE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about our veterans.

Memorial Day was just this past weekend, and we honored those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our Nation.

This weekend also, veterans from around our great country journeyed here to our Nation's Capital to visit the monuments that were publicly erected in their honor. I am so proud that a group of over 60 veterans living in south Florida—including David Millan, Don Lowe, and Augustine Fernandez—were able to make the trip on the first-ever Honor Flight from Miami International Airport, located in my congressional district.

They, like all veterans, are true American patriots, courageous and brave, putting others before themselves, willing to stand up and fight for our Nation's ideals and for the spread of freedom, peace, and prosperity abroad. That is who they are. It is in their DNA.

My family and I, we know the sacrifice and the courage and the resolve that is required to dedicate one's life to the service of our country. My husband, Dexter, proudly served in Vietnam as a U.S. Army Ranger, earning a Purple Heart. My stepson, Douglas, and

his wife, Lindsay, both served tours of duty as Active Duty Marine Corps aviators in Iraq, with Lindsay also having served in Afghanistan. They are still serving our Nation as Marine reservists.

I could not be prouder of them and their fellow veterans and have the highest respect for the families and caregivers who support our vets after they return home from their missions. I recognize that we can never repay our veterans in full for their contributions, but we must certainly try. I would like to think that all Americans feel the same way.

A key part of our Nation's commitment to our veterans has always been providing them with quality health care, especially with respect to injuries suffered in the line of duty; but, more than a year after the most recent VA health system scandal rocked this administration and forced the replacement of a Cabinet Secretary, the VA's commitment on health care continues to fall tragically short.

A year later, the number of patients facing long wait times is still the same, and somehow, the number of patients waiting more than 90 days has actually doubled. A year later, the VA health system continues to fail our veterans. We know that these veterans have the right stuff, the selflessness, the courage, and the pride that they demonstrate in defense of the American way of life; but what must they think of our government now?

Unconscionably long wait times, bureaucratic mismanagement, top-down rationed care are all well below the bare minimum standards any American should expect; yet this is exactly what the VA, under this administration, continues to offer our veterans.

At least this Congress has pushed for reform, for access, for choice. In the last year, we have passed laws that set out to improve access for veterans seeking medical care and mental health services. Congress also provided the VA with \$16 billion to shorten wait times and improve healthcare quality.

I have joined many of my colleagues to demand that the VA publicly release the findings of 140 internal healthcare investigations conducted since 2006 to enforce accountability at the VA. I have also joined a bipartisan contingent of my House colleagues to offer to help the VA staff focus on providing health care by allowing congressional staff to serve as the primary point of contact for veterans asking about their claims and their long appointment times.

Over and over again, Congress' efforts have been met by a stubborn bureaucracy that looks to skirt legislative intent on expanding veterans access and choice and reforming the way that the VA health system does its business.

I am committed to holding the VA under this administration responsible for the continued failings of our VA health system, and I will continue to

fight alongside my colleagues in Congress for the reforms that will provide our veterans with the quality health care they deserve.

We know that our veterans should not have to wait another year. The time is long past; the time is now. The next time that south Florida residents come to D.C. on Honor Flights to visit their war memorials, they will truly know that our Nation honors their service by providing quality health care at all of our VA facilities.

EXPORT-IMPORT BANK

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

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues for allowing me to precede them.

I want to thank the gentlewoman from Florida. Of course, I am always glad to hear her speak on the floor. I wanted her to know that.

Mr. Speaker, we are now less than a month from the deadline for Congress to reauthorize the Export-Import Bank.

In 2012, this House came together under the leadership of the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Cantor, who worked with my office, and we put a bill on the floor that reauthorized the Bank and increased its lending authority with a bipartisan vote of 330–93. This should not be and is not a partisan issue.

Helping small- and medium-sized American businesses access new overseas markets and compete on a level playing field is something that Democrats and Republicans have long agreed that Congress ought to do.

That is why it is deeply concerning to read comments from Majority Leader McCARTHY that Congress should “wind down” the Bank and allow its charter to expire. That, in my view, is a minority opinion on the floor of this House, and that would be a profound mistake.

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The Export-Import Bank is a critical tool that helps our businesses compete successfully in global markets. We are going to talk about trade, apparently, next week, but what we need to make sure is that we can export goods that are made in America, that we will make in America, and that we will sell abroad. The Export-Import Bank facilitates that effort. It is a critical tool that helps businesses compete successfully in global markets.

Last year alone, it supported \$27.5 billion in export activity. About 90 percent of its transactions support thousands of small businesses that otherwise would have difficulty accessing markets.

The Ex-Im Bank has supported 1.3 million private sector jobs since our economic recovery began, including 164,000 jobs just last year, and it does all this without costing the taxpayers