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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. DUNCAN of Tennessee).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
June 11, 2015.

I hereby appoint the Honorable JOHN J. DUNCAN, Jr. 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.

BUILDING A TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE FUTURE

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that after 55 months in control, my Republican friends have scheduled their first hearing on transportation and finance. This is a very important, very welcome development, as welcome as it is long overdue. I appreciate my friend, PAUL RYAN, the chairman of the committee, keeping his

word that we would actually have a hearing.

Now, the question is whether this is going to be one that is more or less perfunctory, sort of a plain vanilla, or whether it is going to be the start of a critical dialogue involving not just ideologues, but the people who do more than just study the issue, hear from the vast army of people who plan, build, maintain, and use our transportation infrastructure. There is a unique, shared, forceful vision. Congress should spend the time not just to listen to those stakeholders, but to understand how they got to where they are and what we need to do.

We shouldn't settle for half steps to just get past the next transportation deadline, which is looming next month, which would be the 34th short-term extension. Just as bad or worse, we would fail to give the country the bold transportation investment that is so sorely needed.

The next hearings are even more important following next Wednesday's effort. That is the time to actually follow regular order, to debate real options.

I have introduced a path. After 20 years of working on transportation funding, it is still the simplest, the best, and the most widely supported. It is the widest coalition, in fact, of any major issue confronting people on Capitol Hill. It includes the AFL-CIO, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, contractors, transit, local government, bicyclists, engineers. It includes the AAA, representing automobile users, and the American Trucking Association. They all support, for the first time in 22 years, raising the Federal gas tax.

We are in the problem we are in now because we are paying for 2015 transportation needs with 1993 dollars. It doesn't work.

My approach would not just raise the gas tax, index the gas tax, but work to

abolish the gas tax because it is no longer a sustainable long-term solution. We can, in fact, replace it with a much more viable, effective, fair system based on road user charges, which we are experimenting with in Oregon, and States around the country are looking at.

In the meantime, we ought to step up and do our job on the gas tax. It is interesting that six red States have already raised the gas tax this year. If it was good enough for Eisenhower, if it was good enough for Ronald Reagan, who used his Thanksgiving Day speech in 1982 to summon Congress back to more than double the gas tax, which he and Tip O'Neill did, it ought to be good enough for us today.

Let's discuss, examine, and understand all the viable solutions, the health of our infrastructure, our economy, and the impacts on the people we serve.

Whatever solution we come up with must meet three tests: It must raise enough to do the job of giving America its first 6-year transportation bill since 1998; it must be dedicated to allow the certainty to be able to build a transportation vision for the future; and it must be sustainable so that we don't end up back in the same place in a year or 2 or 4 or even 5.

My legislation would provide 210 additional billion dollars, enough for the transportation committee to fashion that vision for the future. It is ironclad dedicated over the next 6 years, but it is sustainable because, if Congress hasn't moved to abolish the gas tax by then, at least we don't fall off a cliff.

There was a time when America had the best infrastructure in the world. Sadly, that time has passed. There was a time when infrastructure used to be bipartisan. I am hopeful that if we step up to the plate, approach it in a bipartisan fashion, we can do the job so that we start repairing infrastructure that is now rated 25th or 27th in the world, and going down.

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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We no longer have the finest infrastructure, but we can be bipartisan and thoughtful. We can reverse this 20-year slide. We can put hundreds of thousands of people to work across America at family-wage jobs this year and rebuild and renew America so our families are safer, healthier, and more economically secure.

WE NEED THE RIGHT TRACK, NOT THE FAST TRACK

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

Mr. RUSSELL. Mr. Speaker, TPA, TPP, TTIP, WTO, GATT, fast track, to the American people, we have made the ability to understand trade relations with other nations nigh on impossible.

Politicians, pundits, and prophetic economists are issuing clarion calls to free trade. We all like free trade, but these same advocates insist that we do it fast, you know, put it on a fast track with “trade promotional authority.” Listening to these experts, they insist that we cannot do trade without it. Never mind that for 160 years we negotiated without it under the guide of the Constitution and the watchful eye of the Representatives of the people.

Now, they want the negotiations to be secret: Don’t worry. The trade agreements are complex. They will give us the final agreement, and we will have a little bit of time to look it over. Can’t change it. Just look it over, and then you can have a simple up-or-down vote that could bind America to the terms of other nations.

“But it will create jobs?” they say, just like NAFTA, just like the world trade agreement, just like CAFTA. We were reassured then that those would fix everything. We passed them. We are still waiting for those jobs.

Americans need to ask a few questions of us in this body before we commit to something that could have decades of impact.

The Pacific Partnership includes a transnational commission with a living agreement clause to change it. Why would we surrender congressional authority of a two-thirds vote to stand guard against something that could clearly damage our laws and Nation?

Why would we want to isolate China, possibly driving them toward Russia, and create cold war II. The Army Chief of Staff saw a need this week to ease tensions with China. Why would we want to increase them with anti-Chinese trade rhetoric? You think military spending is high now; try it in a cold war or worse. Let’s trade with China instead, not make them our adversary.

Even a partial pruning of commercial links or even a gradual upsurge in Western protectionism toward China would have a profound impact on the world’s well-being. Why would we pursue a path that most likely creates tension that could spill over in other areas with devastating consequences, sending ripples throughout the world?

The current President’s talent for negotiation among nations should be measured by his foreign policy. Have we forgotten the line in the sand, the arming of al Qaeda and other nefarious Syrian rebels to fight Assad, only to watch them become ISIS, and then dismiss them as a JV team, only to see them tear through Iraq, which fell apart after we abandoned it, after we were assured that they could stand on their own if we left early? Now, there is no strategy to fix it. Then there is the Arab Spring, which has morphed into the potential for a nuclear winter with Iran. Let’s not forget Crimea and Ukraine. I can go on.

The question is: Why are we? Like Lucy holding the football, we are told that the President needs the power to negotiate. If we just come and take a kick at it, all will be well.

Much is at stake. National security, American jobs, capital, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, agricultural, and, contrary to economic theorists, even American law. One only has to look at the case of Australia’s law that made generic packaging required on cigarettes. The law was challenged by a cigarette company who went treaty shopping by using its Hong Kong subsidiary and was able to interfere with Australia’s law because of her treaty with Hong Kong.

Perhaps most concerning is all the anti-Chinese rhetoric. China is an enormous trading partner, a holder of large amounts of U.S. Treasury bonds that have kept interest rates low and our purchasing power at the store high. They are not our enemy. Yet the rhetoric coming from the White House and the architects of the TPA bill seem set on anti-Chinese dictums to make their case.

We need China. China needs us. Let’s establish some rules of the road as competitors rather than laying the track for the smashup derby. It will take time, it will be hard, but dialogue and diplomacy are better than tanks and Tomahawks. We can do this without turning it into a foreign policy disaster that gives the President and Congress a chance to make China our enemy.

We can engage without granting TPA, but we have to lead. TPA without leadership is less valuable than leadership without TPA. Among the proposed Pacific Partnership’s 11 other nations, we already have high-standard, free trade agreements with seven of them. We do not have to subject ourselves to this multilateral trade treaty to work with them, and we certainly should not do it fast by granting TPA to a President that has exhibited poor leadership in foreign affairs.

We need the right track, not the fast track.

WORST TRADE AGREEMENT IN A 20-YEAR HISTORY

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

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, the House of Representatives will be asked to grease the skids for the last and worst trade agreement in a 20-year history of job-killing trade agreements. I say “last” because this is a new concept. It is a living trade agreement. Anybody can access to it in the future. All they have to do is say: We pretend—or will pretend—to follow the very weak rules of this trade agreement.

When the President began the negotiations, China was concerned because he talked about the pivot to Asia, confronting China. Now China is saying: Hey, we want in. This is great. We know how to game it. We can take away the last of your manufacturing, and we are not going to let it just go to Japan who is already in the agreement.

The worst, for many reasons, but among them is something called the investor-state dispute resolution process. What is that? It means there will be a special private court set up for corporations to challenge our domestic laws, any and all domestic laws, that they find to be trade restrictive.

Now, the President came to Oregon and said those of us who are critical of this are making things up because we said they can repeal otherwise. Now, the President danced on the head of a rhetorical pin there, a bit duplicitously. He is right. They can’t make us repeal our laws. We can pay to keep them.

Yes, you heard that right. We can pay to keep our laws that protect consumers, and we can pay to protect our laws that protect the environment or labor or Buy America or anything else. We can keep them if we want to pay.

Here are four examples:

Yesterday, the House of Representatives repealed requirements that meat, poultry be labeled as to country of origin. American consumers would kind of like to know. We have got enough problems in our own industry here. We would like to know if this stuff is coming overseas from someplace where maybe the sanitary conditions aren’t quite so good. Well, we lost a trade dispute on that issue.

Now, we could keep the law if we wanted to pay billions of dollars or, no, a Republican rush to repeal the law. It makes a few giant agribusiness companies happy. Of course, it kind of sticks it to the domestic producers who know they are producing a good product. That is one loss.

Brazilian cotton, now, this is a funny one. We provide these bizarre subsidies through our foreign program, and one of them goes to cotton.

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We were found to be subsidizing, therefore, putting Brazil at a disadvantage. For years, we paid Brazil \$147 million a year so we could keep subsidizing our cotton producers. Isn’t that great?

Yeah, we kept our law; we just cost us \$147 million to subsidize the cotton