

TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, last month Congress dealt with a trade package that centered on trade promotion authority; and those actions, while important, were really just the beginning of a very long process.

Many important provisions of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the TPP, are still unresolved. There is a meeting at the end of this month in Hawaii where the finance ministers of 12 countries come together in an attempt to resolve these final questions.

As I pointed out in my last meeting with the President, while I think trade promotion authority is important and worthy of support, that support does not imply support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Indeed, because of the protections we built into the trade promotion authority, it sets an appropriately high standard for approval. Everybody in America will have several months to examine the proposal if an agreement is reached to see if it measures up before the treaty can even be voted on by Congress.

I am hopeful that we can use this time to clarify and refine areas, for example, the investor state dispute process. While the United States' investor state protections for public health and consumers are stronger than for most countries and are separate from the foreign investor state models that are being used by the United States Chamber of Commerce to promote the interests of Big Tobacco to undercut efforts to discourage smoking, there is still room for us to improve and clarify the American model, and we should do so.

Another important area deals with trade enforcement. Agreements that look good on paper, if they are not enforceable or enforced, are essentially meaningless. It is extremely important for the administration to demonstrate its commitment to enforcement.

We are trying to help with legislation that I have introduced in the House that we have been able to get in part of the Senate package that would create a trade enforcement fund dedicated to help make sure agreements are enforced.

Another step the administration could take immediately is to deal with disturbing actions in Peru that seem to undercut commitments that were made in the existing Peru free trade agreement dealing with illegal logging. It appears that Peru has backtracked on its commitments and that illegally harvested timber is finding its way into international markets and, indeed, into the United States. It would be a simple act for the administration to take that would demonstrate its commitment to strong enforcement by starting with Peru right now.

Another area that I am working on deals with access to medicines. It appears that the TPP draft falls short on

incentives for affordability and consumer protections and the trade promotion authority objective to “ensure that trade agreements foster innovation and promote access to medicines.” We need some work here.

The May 10 agreement that was struck in 2007, which I was pleased to participate in, struck the right balance, creating incentives for innovation in pharmaceutical research and access to timely and affordable medicine for developing countries. This was achieved in part by requiring changes to provisions dealing with patent linkage where it looks like TPP is moving in the wrong direction.

The TPP includes new provisions which, while not addressed in the May 10 agreement, are inconsistent with its spirit and its intent of ensuring timely access to affordable medicines in developing countries. For example, with biologic medicines, it appears the United States is seeking both patent linkage and 12 years of data exclusivity for all countries. The former would require a change in U.S. law, and the latter would prevent America from changing our laws to lower the exclusivity period, as has been proposed in the President's own budget proposal. The combination of these two would have enormous cost implications both at home and abroad.

These are examples where I am working to make sure the final agreement measures up to the criteria we have established in the trade promotion authority.

I urge the administration and my colleagues to be clear about our intent and our expectations in order for any final agreement to be worthy of broad support.

BACKPACK BUDDIES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOONEY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MOONEY of West Virginia. Mr. Speaker, last week I had the pleasure of meeting with Doug Erwin. Doug is an extraordinary member of our West Virginia community who started the charitable organization called Backpack Buddies.

In the summer, Backpack Buddies gives meal supplements to children in elementary, middle, and high schools who received free or reduced lunches during the school year. Oftentimes, the meal that they receive at school is the only food that they eat all day.

Doug became concerned about what these children did for food during the summer. That is when Doug started Backpack Buddies.

For the last 3 years, communities in my district in the great State of West Virginia have come together to raise money to provide food to these children so they can get the extra help they need during the summer. Backpack Buddies is serving, now, over 1,600 children in Putnam, Boone, Cabell, and Kanawha Counties this summer.

I would like to thank Doug, the business leaders in our community, and the volunteers who help make Backpack Buddies possible.

WAR ON COAL

Mr. MOONEY of West Virginia. On a separate issue, Mr. Speaker, several weeks ago, President Obama sent two of his top cronies in his war on coal, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and Office of Surface Mining Director Joseph Pizarchik, to my home State of West Virginia.

The apparent purpose of their visit was to seek input for a new Obama regulation that is estimated to kill 80,000 coal jobs, but their rule had already been submitted for final review. They are not interested in hearing from West Virginians about the impact of their policies. Instead, they are checking a box.

It is clear that nothing will stop this President from trying to implement his radical environmental agenda, and I will continue to do everything in my power to fight back on behalf of all West Virginians. That is why, this year, I introduced H.R. 1644, the STREAM Act, which will stop the President's antimining regulations. I also included a provision in the House budget resolution that calls for defunding that regulation, and I will work with the appropriators to make sure it is not funded.

I hope my colleagues in this Chamber will join me in this fight.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

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

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, since the Supreme Court decision in Citizens United, we have seen a massive wave of secret spending in our political system. There was over \$100 million in dark, unregulated, and anonymous money spent in the 2014 midterm election cycle; and with the Presidential race right around the corner, that number is expected to balloon to over \$600 million.

While the problem is easy to identify, the solution is far more difficult to achieve. Reluctantly, I have concluded that it is necessary to amend our Constitution to address a long line of case law that began before Citizens United and prevents the Congress from meaningfully regulating campaign expenditures. The constitutional amendment must not only overturn Citizens United, but the Arizona Free Enterprise Club's Freedom Club PAC v. Bennett decision, which struck down an Arizona law that allowed public financing of a candidate if their opponent exceeded certain spending limits.

The amendment is simple. It would allow Congress to set reasonable limits on expenditures and allow States to set up public financing for candidates if they choose to do so.

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I first ran for Congress in 2000, in a campaign that turned out to be the

most expensive in U.S. history and helped propel new campaign finance reform. It was this first-hand experience which convinced me that our elections have increasingly come to be polluted by ever-increasing amounts of unregulated outside spending.

Millions of dollars in soft money, spending that avoided limits because of misguided legal distinctions between contributions to a candidate and independent expenditures in support of a candidate, plagued that 2000 race and almost every major Federal race since.

On my very first day in Congress, I cosponsored the McCain-Feingold Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act, which attempted to ban soft money expenditures and allowed for public financing of campaigns. The bill passed, and for a brief window, the campaign finance system became more transparent and limited. That was, sadly, short lived.

With Citizens United, the Supreme Court struck down decades of restrictions on corporate campaign spending and freed corporations to spend unlimited funds to run campaign advertisements.

The court has also allowed wealthy individuals and groups to spend with impunity, with only a theoretical restriction that they do not coordinate with campaigns, but the reality is that the FEC has dismissed 29 cases in which super-PACs were suspected of illegally coordinating with candidates without even investigating the claims.

Frustrating as it is for a candidate to contend with attacks by super-PACs or soft money, as I was, disclosure laws at least allow us to alert voters to the special interest which is behind those expenditures. Candidates being drowned out in attacks paid for by dark money, however, don't have that luxury.

Groups who raise dark money do so by exploiting IRS regulations, designating them "social welfare nonprofits," which allow them to operate tax exempt and raise unlimited money completely anonymously.

Nothing about funneling millions in secret dollars to support campaigns could be construed to be in the interest of social welfare—nothing. Social welfare nonprofits are supposed to limit their political activity, but IRS audits, even of groups that spend vast amounts of their time and budget in support of candidates, are extremely rare.

Investigations into complaints of abuse can take years, at which point an election will long be over, the damage done.

The Supreme Court has overturned decades of legal precedent, the regulatory process is at a standstill, and still, we watch billions pour into campaigns and in increasingly anonymous fashion.

Sadly, we are left with one option, a constitutional amendment that allows Congress to set reasonable limits on both donations and expenditures and shines the light of day on both.

IRAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) for 5 minutes.

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join my colleagues to express a deep concern about the ongoing negotiations with Iran over the country's nuclear capabilities.

As many of my colleagues have noted on the floor of this House, preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon is critical to securing peace in the region and protecting U.S. interests, including our close ally Israel.

It was good to hear Secretary Kerry's recent commitment not "to shave anywhere at the margins in order to just get an agreement" and to work for an agreement that will pass scrutiny. However, media reports from the negotiations in Vienna indicate that Iran has tried to renegotiate the previously released framework and continues to demand further concessions from international negotiators.

Among the latest demands from Tehran is that all United Nations sanctions against the country, including the ban on the import or export of conventional arms, be lifted as part of any deal.

Well, I have a response to that demand: unacceptable. Lifting the arms embargo would serve only to further destabilize the Middle East and accelerate Iran's arming of Shiite militias.

The Iranians have also sought to keep hidden Iran's current and previous efforts to gain nuclear weapons capability. How can the international community know with certainty that Iran is complying with an agreement to reduce significantly its enrichment activities if the full extent of these activities is kept secret?

It defies logic that such a request should be made and makes far less sense for such a request to be given any serious consideration.

Likewise, demands to limit IAEA inspectors to select sites, to install absurd bureaucratic processes to access additional sites, and to prohibit altogether inspections of so-called military sites should be fully rejected.

Ultimately, it is critical that any deal prevents Iran from gaining nuclear weapons capabilities and ensures that international inspectors can validate their adherence to an agreement's negotiated terms. If Iran cannot negotiate in good faith, then perhaps it is time to leave the negotiating table altogether.

STRONG STEM EDUCATION POLICY

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

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, in a few short hours, we are going to be voting in this Chamber on a rewrite of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which is long overdue.

It has been 13 years since the No Child Left Behind Act was passed, and many educators and probably all Members have heard a lot of the clumsy and unworkable provisions that need a rewrite. More importantly, there are other reasons why it is time for a new law for our K-12 system.

Educating our children is a dynamic process, and everything from technology in the classroom, as well as the workforce needs of our national economy, have drastically changed in the last 13 years.

Clearly, as a nation, we need to use this rewrite of Federal education law as an opportunity to equip our Nation, and particularly our children and grandchildren, with the tools they need to succeed.

One area which we all know needs updating and strengthening is the area of STEM education—science, technology, engineering, and math. Employers all across the country are desperate to try and find incoming young people into our workforce who have these skills to succeed.

The good news is, in the last 13 years, STEM occupations have grown three times faster than non-STEM occupations. In addition, the average income is two times higher in terms of the wages of STEM-educated workers compared to non-STEM. That is the good news.

The bad news is that only 16 percent of graduating high school seniors are interested in STEM. If you drill down deeper, young girls and young minorities are woefully underrepresented in the single digits.

Clearly, we need to move stronger as a nation in the area of STEM. If you look globally, China is producing 23 percent of the world's STEM degree graduates—the U.S., only 10 percent.

Mr. Speaker, if you go back 58 years ago, our 34th President, Dwight Eisenhower, confronted a similar moment of crisis in terms of our education system.

In October 1957, the Soviet Union launched the Sputnik satellite, which shocked our Nation. We realized we were falling behind and that we needed to step up our game in terms of our educational and research system. This Republican President led the charge to pass the National Defense Education Act in 1958, which boosted and set a national goal, a national priority, for science and research across our country.

At the time that he signed the bill in 1958, he said that, in both education and research, we needed to redouble our exertions, which will be necessary on the part of all Americans if we are to rise to the demands of our times.

He also noted that this bill, the National Defense Education Act, back in 1958, would "do much to strengthen our American system of education so it can meet the broad and increasing demands imposed upon it by considerations of basic national security."

Fast forward 57 years, we now have a national STEM education coalition