

family received a proof-of-life video. Then, 1 year later, they received photographs of Bob, in April of 2011. Since then, nothing.

Now, if the Government of Iran really wanted to help, they could. It may be that one part of the Iranian Government is keeping it from other parts. It could be the military—or the special part of the military, the Quds Force—knows, and it may be that the Foreign Minister and the President of Iran do not have the facts. But there is somebody in Iran who can produce the facts, if he wanted to, and that is the Supreme Leader.

Now, in this era of intense negotiations over preventing Iran from having a nuclear weapon and preventing them from the ability to develop a nuclear weapon any time in the next 10 years without us at least getting 1 year's advance notice so we can take countermeasures; in this time of intense discussions with Iran—of course, it is constantly brought up by our negotiating team, including Secretary of State Kerry, but it is rather inexcusable that the only answer Iran has is, We don't know anything about Bob Levinson.

This is, of course, personal to the FBI community because the hostage is one of their retired agents. It is personal to us in Florida as well. Bob left behind a wife, seven children, and four grandchildren. Christine Levinson lives in Florida. A number of the FBI agents who have tried to help her over the course of the years also live in Florida. We are hopefully and prayerfully expectant that if it is a successfully concluded negotiation to prevent Iran from having a nuclear weapon, that the Government of Iran will immediately release all Americans who are in jail whom we know about and likewise will make the effort to find Bob and bring him home to his wife and seven children. That is what humanity would absolutely require.

So at this particular time—8 years-plus into the process—we make this plea for former FBI agent Bob Levinson.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, spring in Washington, DC, is one of the most beautiful times of the year, as it is in Connecticut and around the country. We have endured a tough winter in the Northeast—a lot of snow and a lot of cold. And now a lot of potholes are all around the country. Spring means potholes, which are endemic not only to the Northeast but to our roads

all around America. Potholes are just the latest reminder of infrastructure challenges facing our Nation. That is one reason why this week is, in fact, Infrastructure Week, a time when we should be focusing on rail and roads, the decaying and aging infrastructure that bedevils and hobbles our Nation as we seek to compete globally. And our businesses in Connecticut seek to compete nationally as well as globally.

This time of year is also the beginning of the construction season, especially in the colder regions of the country, such as the Northeast and Iowa, Nebraska, and the Midwest.

In Connecticut, construction workers are ready to go, ready to take advantage of this chance to address our aging and decaying transportation assets.

I know that trade is on our agenda this week. I urge and implore that trade be set aside, that the trade bill be delayed—not forever, by any means. As the leader of our caucus has urged—our leader HARRY REID has implored that we focus on infrastructure. We face a deadline. May marks the last month of MAP-21, the law governing surface transportation funding. On May 31—just 20 days from now—the authorization governing our highway trust fund will expire. That is right. There is a highway cliff that we are just days away from going over. This Nation will go over that cliff unless we act, and now is the moment. Now is the time. Now is our opportunity, and it is an opportunity that will not excuse us from acting.

The bill covers more than just funding. It is crucial to keeping our roadways safe. Now, 2014 was a record year for auto recalls, auto problems, and issues. So part of what needs to be done in addressing the expiration of MAP-21 is to make safety a priority. But it cannot be achieved if we don't address the fundamental challenges of our aging infrastructure.

Fundamental reforms are needed at the NHTSA and other safety watchdogs to make sure our constituents are safe. So one would think now would be the time to discuss legislation that would fix our streets and stop potholes from imperiling our drivers and put construction workers back on the job, providing a lifeline to nearly 2 million Americans who have jobs directly tied to the transportation sector.

One would think we would want to cut down on our unemployment. In the construction sector, joblessness remains at a 10-percent level. You would think that now is the time to be advancing a multiyear, long-term bill that will provide certainty to States and municipalities so they can finalize planning for long-term projects. You would think that now is the time to take a hard look at our safety oversight agencies—NHTSA, the FRA, the Federal Highway Administration—and to make reforms and increase the tools that they have in fines and penalties they can exact to protect all who rely on our transportation network.

Unfortunately, the approach of this Congress is going to be, as engineers say, patch and pray. Patch the potholes, patch the roads, patch the railroads—even when the tracks are cracked, even when ballasts are failing. Patch the bridges. Patch and pray. We are about to become a nation of patch and pray when it comes to decaying, deficient roads, bridges, railroads, and all the vital nuts and bolts, literally, that transport our Nation.

How ironic it is at this moment—when it is spring, when the construction industry is about to rely on the opportunities it has to put people back to work, and when many of us in this Chamber and others at school commencements will be talking about the big ideas, the big challenges, the big dreams and hopes that our graduates have for the future—that we are thinking small. We are thinking about patching—patching our highway transit fund for months, maybe until the end of the year. A nation that patches and prays cannot be exceptional, cannot be a great nation when it comes to shortchanging investments in the vital facilities, in the nuts and bolts, in the roads and bridges that make it a national competitor.

This kind of short-term extension of a highway and transit system fails to match the challenges that our Nation faces. We spend less and invest less as a percentage of our gross domestic product than many other industrialized nations. Europe and China spend far more as a percentage of their gross domestic product than we do.

So I call on the leadership, my good friends and colleagues on the other side of the aisle, to make infrastructure our priority for this week, as it should be for this decade. Within this decade, according to some projections, one in four of our bridges will be 65 years or older, making them even more prone to decay and disrepair.

The consequences are real and costly. Bridges collapse, such as the 50-year old Skagit River Bridge in Washington. The bridge collapsed sending cars into the river below. That wasn't a remote bridge. It was over Interstate 5, a major artery on the west coast. Of course, we all remember the 2007 bridge collapse in Minneapolis. We remember the Mianus River Bridge collapse in Connecticut, the Bridgeport derailment due to decaying and cracking tracks that were improperly repaired. We remember where lives were lost because of a derailment and the failure to invest in train communication and signaling that could have prevented that tragedy. We remember the railroad grade crossings where insufficient investment in modern technology causes deaths all around the country—hundreds of them every year—not to mention billions of dollars due to these collisions, derailments, crashes on the roads, costing lives and imperiling our Nation's future.

A short-term patch robs our States and municipalities of the certainty

they need to contract what is essential to construction at the lowest possible cost in the most efficient way. The certainty and reliability in funding are essential to our municipalities, knowing what their resources will be not just this year but into the future and driving that bargaining with contractors and subcontractors.

It is not just because of our rebuilding needs that we need this investment. There are also many other significant related issues that we must address to keep our roads and bridges safe and reliable. We need to ensure that trucks on the road aren't too big, that truck drivers have enough rest, that our railroads are properly overseen, that constant train control is implemented, that testing for physical and emotional problems is done regularly and reliably. And the long list of NTSB regulations needs to be finally addressed and implemented.

We are in a time when we are talking to young men and women as they graduate from school about those big ideas and about their futures and dreams, when we invoke what is best and brightest about America, our foresight, our strength, our courage to take risks, to invest in ourselves and our future. It is the same spirit that led to the building of the Erie Canal, the transcontinental railroad, and the interstate highway system. Those initiatives were not partisan initiatives. The greatest generation came back from World War II and built the interstate highways under the leadership of President Dwight Eisenhower. He was committed to making America one Nation in its roads, tying us and binding us together as a Nation through that investment. He had the courage—as we should today—to say that what is great about America is what we give back, what we are willing to invest—not only for today, but for tomorrow.

And we are in danger today in this Chamber, in this Nation, of being one of the first generations that left a lesser America for our children. Think of it—a lesser America at a time when the words “exceptional” and “exceptionalism” trip off the tongues of many of our colleagues here in the Chamber. We need to match that rhetoric with real action.

So today, let us resolve that we will debate and act on a long-term investment program to make sure that our roads and bridges, our railroads and airports, and the ports that could make our Nation the envy of the world are matching our rhetoric and our goals; that they truly make us competitive for businesses in Connecticut and around the Nation, competitive on the global scene, where competition has never been tougher and where our infrastructure needs to be better.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COATS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

WASTEFUL SPENDING

Mr. COATS. Madam President, I am back on the floor again for “Waste of the Week” No. 10. As my colleagues know, I have been coming down every week talking about waste, fraud, and abuse, ways we can save taxpayer dollars. While we have not been able to address, unfortunately, tragically, the larger issue of the plunge into deficit spending and debt that our Nation has incurred over the past several years, in particular—every effort, every bipartisan effort, has been thwarted by the President's refusal to engage in that, and yet the debt clock keeps on ticking. We keep spending more money than we take in. We keep putting more and more of a burden on future generations as well as our own.

Our economy is not growing. One of the reasons is that we have not achieved fiscal responsibility in the Congress. So while we have not been able to address the larger issue, we can at least address some of those issues that have been documented as waste, fraud, and abuse, documented by non-partisan agencies that are established for the sole purpose of weeding out some of the excess spending that is not essential to the functioning of government.

We have put up some pretty interesting numbers relative to what we have achieved. We are already over \$50 billion of spending that has been documented as totally unnecessary. Some of it has been of the character of somewhat ridiculous. Some has been very, very substantial. We are going to continue to do this, pointing out to the American taxpayer and pointing out to government officials who run these agencies and make these decisions that we simply cannot afford to keep doing this.

So today's waste of the week will be addressed, hopefully by the Appropriations Committee, which will soon be working now that we have passed a budget, to distribute those funds that are necessary for the functioning of government.

I am urging them to use a system and means of identifying what is essential and what is not essential. Now, there may be some things we would like to do but cannot afford to do. They need to be put on hold until we can do them. But there are a lot of issues and a lot of spending that goes on that should not be done in the first place.

Significant savings can be made. Even though it is much smaller than what we need to do, we certainly can address issues that will save taxpayer dollars and better allocate spending for government. When our previous Governor in Indiana, Mitch Daniels, took over, he brought with him a resume as

former Director of the Office of Management and Budget. Then-President George W. Bush gave him the name “The Blade.” “The Blade” looked at every small, little detail of spending and asked a lot of questions: Why are we doing this? How can we save? How can we make government more efficient? There are essential things government has to do. But when he became Governor, he transferred over some of that knowledge and expertise and started doing some simple things, asking some simple questions: Why are we spending money on this? Why are we spending money on that?

Let me give you just a couple of examples. He gathered some of his staff and said: I want you to go out and put pennies on the tires of our State-owned vehicles wherever they are housed. Wherever they are parked, put pennies on them. He waited several months then said: Now, go back and identify all of those vehicles where the pennies are still on the tire. In other words, they had not been moved. They had not even been shifted to another parking spot. They simply were just sitting there.

Well, interestingly enough, he found that many unused State vehicles still had the pennies on their tires. If they had been sitting there for months and nobody was using them, why are we paying for them? Why are we spending money on purchasing these? Let's sell them off, save some money for the State. They obviously are not necessary. It was one-third of the State's fleet of vehicles.

Another thing he did, he said: Let's look at our printing costs. The State had its own printing operation. He said: Let's shop around and see if the private sector can do this more effectively and efficiently. Of course, they did find a private vendor in Indiana that did it much more effectively.

You save a lot of money just going black and white, maybe not quite as pretty, maybe not quite as attractive as color, but another way to save money.

These are small things, but when you total them up for all the agencies that are in Washington—as was determined by the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform—it adds up to a lot of money. This government is more vast than anyone can possibly imagine.

Well, the Commission found that Federal agencies could save at least \$10 billion over 10 years by cutting out waste in federal travel, printing and vehicle expenses. So here again is a waste of the week that we are going to add to our ever-increasing gauge of the waste. All this now in red, these are what we have been adding, the 10 items that we have added. We are approaching now, looks like \$60 billion, on our way to \$100 billion. I think we will probably be having to add extensions to this because, folks, I mean, there is waste out there, there is fraud out there, there is abuse out there like you would not believe.