

need to invest in 21st-century systems and equipment and stop relying on patchwork upgrades to old, rusted 19th century rail lines.

I travel Amtrak, as I said, virtually every week. I travel the Acela, which is supposed to be our high-speed rail. It is like shake, rattle, and roll. As a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I have traveled in other countries in the world, such as Japan. They have a bullet train in which you virtually cannot feel anything while you are on the train, going at speeds far in excess of what we call high-speed rail.

Now, there are still many questions to which we do not know the answers. Was there human failure? Was there a mechanical failure or were there infrastructure issues or was it a combination of issues? What we do know is that our rail passengers deserve safe and modern infrastructure. New Jersey, for example, is at the heart of the Northeast corridor. It has long held a competitive advantage with some of the Nation's most modern highways, an extensive transit network, and some of the most significant freight corridors in the world at the confluence of some of the largest and busiest rail lines, interstates, and ports.

In a densely populated State such as New Jersey, the ability to move people and goods safely and efficiently is critical to our economy and critical to our quality of life. But, unfortunately, in recent years, New Jersey and the Nation as a whole have fallen behind. We have 20 years maximum—maximum—before the Hudson River tunnels are taken out of service. Twenty years may sound maybe to some of our young pages like a long time, but it is a flash of the eye. Think about what happens if we take either or both of those tunnels out of service without an alternative, tunnels that are absolutely essential to moving people and goods in the region that contributes \$3.5 trillion to our Nation's economy—20 percent of the entire Nation's gross domestic product.

Nationwide, 65 percent of major roads in America are in poor condition. One in four bridges in our Nation needs significant repair. There is an \$808 billion backlog in highway and bridge investment needs. On the transit side, there is an \$86 billion backlog of transit maintenance needs—maintenance needs, not expanding, just maintaining that which we have.

It will take almost \$19 billion a year through the year 2030 to bring our transit assets into good repair. These are just a handful of the statistics underscoring our Nation's failure to invest in our transportation network. But we have to get beyond looking at the numbers on a page. We have to talk about what Congress's failure to act means to the people we represent, to every community—every community, every commuter, every family, everyone who travels every day, and every construction worker looking for a job.

Failure to act means construction workers now face a 10-percent unemployment rate, and at a time when our infrastructure is crumbling around us, they will not get the work they need. It means a business cannot compete in a globalized economy because their goods cannot get to market in time. It means a working mother is stuck in traffic and cannot get home in time for dinner with her kids. In the very worst cases—cases such as the one we saw yesterday on Amtrak—it very well means that a loved one is lost in a senseless tragedy.

In Congress, we too often treat our infrastructure as if it is an academic exercise, as if it is numbers on a page that we adjust to score political points or balance a budget or make an argument about what types of transportation are worthy of our support. But that is not the real world. In the real world, the choices we make have an impact on people's lives, on their jobs, on their income. They have an impact on our Nation's ability to compete. They have an impact on the safety of Americans and America's ability to lead globally the economy in the world.

We in Congress are failing to recognize the real-world impacts of the choices we make about our transportation infrastructure. We have a passenger rail bill that expired in 2013. We have a highway trust fund on the brink of insolvency, with no plans—no plans—to fix it sustainably. We have a crowded and outdated aviation system that we refuse to adequately fund. We have failed to upgrade with presently available technologies that can reduce the number of failures. We have appropriations bills aiming to cut already-low funding levels of Amtrak, in particular, to meet an arbitrary budget cap for the sake of political points.

I cannot understand that. I cannot understand that. We are living off the greatest generation's investment in infrastructure in this country. We have done nothing to honor that investment, to sustain it or to build upon it. Yet nothing we are doing is aimed at fixing the problem. Our inaction comes with an extraordinarily high cost. So I can tell you, as the senior Democrat on the subcommittee on mass transit, I categorically reject the idea that we cannot afford to fix our transportation system.

The truth is, we cannot afford not to fix it. The Amtrak disaster last night is a tragic reminder that we have to act. We are reminded of the tragic consequences of inaction and the impact of inaction on the lives of workers and families, on their lives and their ability to get to work and do their jobs with confidence that they will be safe.

So, as a member of the Finance Committee, and the ranking member of the transit subcommittee, I have been advocating that we act as soon as possible. We cannot keep pretending the problem is going to resolve itself if we just wait long enough. We simply cannot afford to wait. I hope that everyone

in this Chamber—Democrats, Republicans, and Independents alike—will come together, will work together, and make real progress in building the future that we can be proud of.

We can start by putting politics aside to think about the safety of the American people, to think about the future, to think about America's competitiveness, and to find common ground to do whatever it takes to invest in America's railroads, ports, highways, and bridges, and to invest in our future.

So let's not wait until there is another tragic headline or to see the consequences of what flows, as people along the entire Northeast corridor are trying to figure out alternatives in the midst of a system that is now shut down for intercity travel—all the transit lines of States and regions within the Northeast corridor that depend upon using Amtrak lines to get to different destinations for their residents, to get people to one of the great hospitals along the Northeast corridor, to get people to their Nation's Capital to advocate with their government, to get people and the sales forces of companies to work, to get home.

Let's not wait until we have another tragedy to think about the consequences of our transportation system, what it means to the Nation, or until the next time when lives are lost. I think we can do much better. I have faith that hopefully this will be a crystalizing moment for us on this critical issue.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF SALLY QUILLIAN YATES TO BE DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Sally Quillian Yates, of Georgia, to be Deputy Attorney General.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There will now be up to 1 hour of debate, equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I am delighted we have the confirmation of Sally Yates before the body. I have pushed for a vote for several weeks, and now I know we are finally going to confirm Sally Yates to be our next Deputy Attorney General of the United States. I think she will be easily confirmed. I know there has been a delay

of several weeks getting her here, but I thank Senator ISAKSON, who worked so hard to get her before this body. It should not have taken this long. Ms. Yates was voted out of the Judiciary Committee with overwhelming bipartisan support almost 3 weeks ago. We are finally voting to confirm her today to serve as the second highest law enforcement office in our country, and it is long past due. This is the least we can do to honor law enforcement, as it is National Police Week.

The Deputy Attorney General is critical to the efficient functioning of the Department of Justice. The person serving in that position works diligently behind the scenes. The position requires someone who is of utmost competence, who prioritizes the Department above all else, and who executes the mission and vision of the Attorney General.

We are actually fortunate here. We will have an Attorney General and a Deputy Attorney General whose backgrounds are very similar—both have shown their ability as law enforcement officers, both have been prosecuting attorneys, and both have similar views, as we saw during the confirmation hearings, on all the major issues.

Sally Yates is an ideal person for this position, as those who know her can attest. She was born and raised in Atlanta, GA. She grew up seeing the justice system as a force for good. There was no need to look outside her home for an Atticus Finch to look up to because her family members lived that example. Her father, Kelly Quillian, was a judge on the Georgia Court of Appeals; her grandfather, Joseph Quillian, was a justice on the Georgia Supreme Court; and at a time when women did not fill the ranks of the legal system, her grandmother, Tabitha Quillian, became one of the first women to be admitted to the Georgia bar. Ms. Yates carried on that family tradition, becoming a top-notch lawyer who has prioritized public service above all else.

For more than 25 years, Sally Yates served as a prosecutor in the Office of the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia. For the past 5 years she has served as U.S. Attorney of that district, following her unanimous confirmation by the Senate in 2010.

Since January of this year, she has served as Acting Deputy Attorney General. I have been at briefings she has given to Members of the Senate. I have also been at briefings at the White House where she has briefed the President on issues before the country. She is an experienced and dedicated prosecutor with a well-deserved reputation for fairness, integrity, and toughness.

She is perhaps best known for her successful prosecutions of the Atlanta Olympics bomber, who pled guilty in exchange for a life sentence without parole; and for her prosecution and conviction of a former Atlanta mayor for tax evasion. However, if you were to ask her the most significant case

she has taken on, she will tell you that it involved a pro bono representation when she was just out of law school.

As a junior associate at a law firm, Ms. Yates represented the first African-American family to own land in Barrow County, GA, in a property dispute. The family had obtained a deed to their property, but lacking trust in the court system, had failed to record their deed in a timely manner. As a result, when the adjoining property was sold, a dispute arose as to who owned part of the land. Ms. Yates filed suit to recover the family's property. After a 1-week trial—in which she helped convince a member of the "Dixie Mafia" to testify in court on behalf of the family—she was able to win the case before an all-white jury.

According to Ms. Yates, it was the most meaningful case of her career because it gave the African American family she represented a sense of trust in the judicial system that they previously lacked. This case represents who she is as an attorney: someone who uses the judicial system as a force for good.

It is also an example of why she will thrive as the Deputy Attorney General. While most people seek the spotlight by pursuing high-profile matters, Sally Yates devotes herself to the matters that are less glamorous, but just as important.

Ms. Yates also deserves praise for her dedication to sentencing reform and the clemency initiative begun by her predecessor, Jim Cole. It is encouraging to see that we will continue to have individuals in the Justice Department's leadership who understand the inequities in our criminal justice system's sentencing practices and the consequences of mass incarceration. As she made clear when she testified before the Judiciary Committee, sentencing reform is critical to ensure that we better allocate our limited law enforcement resources and to make our country safer. The clemency initiative is an important part of that process as well and I am glad that I have her commitment that it will be a priority.

Sally Yates has received strong bipartisan support for her nomination. Among the letters of support the Judiciary Committee has received are those from Georgia's Republican Governor, Nathan Deal; Georgia's Republican Attorney General, Samuel Olens; and former Democratic Senator from Georgia, Sam Nunn. She also has the support of law enforcement and civil rights leaders.

At her nomination hearing, Ms. Yates was introduced by Congressman JOHN LEWIS, Senator PERDUE and Senator ISAKSON. As Senator ISAKSON noted when Ms. Yates was first nominated this past December, "Sally Yates is an exceptionally skilled attorney with a strong record of public service and a well-qualified nominee to be Deputy Attorney General." Prior to his retirement, Senator Saxby Chambliss also spoke out in support of Ms. Yates' nomination.

Almost 3 weeks ago, her nomination was voted out of Committee with strong bipartisan support, so this nomination should not be an occasion for further partisanship. The responsibilities of the Deputy Attorney General are too important to the safety and security of all Americans to be held up any longer. The dedicated public servants at the Justice Department deserve a confirmed leader in this crucial position, and I know Sally Yates will serve with distinction as our next Deputy Attorney General of the United States. I thank her for her willingness to continue to serve this great Nation, and I want to publicly congratulate her on this well-deserved appointment.

TRIBUTE TO ERIC HOLDER

Mr. President, I want to talk about a different but related issue.

Two weeks ago, after 5 long months, Loretta Lynch was finally sworn in as the 83rd Attorney General of the United States. I know she is going to be an exceptional Attorney General, and she has an exceptional deputy in Sally Yates. But I want to speak here about the remarkable service of Eric Holder, who has just left as Attorney General.

Many don't realize that he came to the Justice Department as a 25-year-old law school graduate in 1976. He has served at nearly every level of the Department over the past four decades. I believe we owe him our gratitude for his commitment to public service.

I also know on a personal basis how much Marcelle and I appreciate the friendship we have with Eric and his wonderful wife, Sharon.

When Eric Holder's nomination was first announced in 2008, I said that we needed an Attorney General who, as Robert Jackson said 68 years ago, "serves the law and not factual purposes, and who approaches his task with humility." Well, that is what I said we needed, and that is what we got. It is the kind of man Eric Holder is and the kind of Attorney General he has been. He understands our moral and legal obligation to protect the fundamental rights of all Americans and to respect the human rights of all people. His leadership over the past 6 years shows us that.

I was there when he was sworn in as the 82nd Attorney General. His family was there—his wife, mother, children, and others. Upon being sworn in, he immediately changed the tone of the Department. As he finished taking the oath, you heard this roar throughout the marbled and granite halls of the Department of Justice. The building literally shook with cheers. The dedicated professionals knew the Department was once again going to be dedicated to a nonpartisan search for justice for all Americans. These are highly professional and highly dedicated men and women appointed by both Republican and Democratic administrations, who set aside politics. They just want professionalism. And they knew, with Eric Holder, they would get it.