THE TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE CREDIT ACT OF 1997

HON. ROSA L. DeLAURO

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 1997

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, today I introduced the Transportation Infrastructure Credit Act of 1997. This bill will create public-private partnerships to build more highway and mass transit projects, and create tens of thousands of new jobs. I am pleased to be joined by my colleagues, Representatives BONIOR, FROST, OLVER, GREEN, KENNEDY of Rhode Island, MCGOVERN, and Delegate CHRISTIAN-GREEN in offering this important proposal.

The House of Representatives recently voted to reject, by a vote of 214 to 216, a $12-billion, 5-year increase in funding for highway and mass transit projects above the current $125 billion budget proposal. Like many of my colleagues who supported this modest increase in transportation construction funds, I was disappointed by the House's failure to agree to these additional moneys.

Our Nation needs additional capital to meet the more than $30 billion annual shortfall in funds to construct highway and mass transit projects. The Government must encourage private infrastructure investment to match overseas investments. In Asia, 10 to 15 percent of all infrastructure is privately owned. However, in the U.S., less than 1 percent of transportation infrastructure is privately owned. The Transportation Infrastructure Credit Act encourages private sector development, ownership, and financing of our Nation's infrastructure needs.

This bill is needed because there is no compatible financing mechanism available for large projects that exceed $100 million. Unlike State Infrastructure Banks created by the ISTEA bill, this bill will give the U.S. Department of Transportation the capacity to make loans immediately to large State and interstate infrastructure projects.

The Transportation Infrastructure Credit Act offers an innovative approach to addressing this financing shortfall. It proposes spending $500 million in Federal funds over 5 years to leverage $10 billion in private capital investments in transportation infrastructure. The legislation authorizes $100 million annually in credit incentives for 5 years. These funds would be administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation [DOT], which would offer four financing products that would attract private investments in highway and mass transit projects.

Public-private partnerships created through the Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act can leverage $2 billion in actual construction for every $100 million invested by the Federal Government. Each $1 billion invested in infrastructure creates between 20,000 and 30,000 jobs. This means that the bill can create as many as 300,000 new jobs on top of those created by traditional ISTEA funding.

These four financing mechanisms are particularly attractive to project sponsors interested in financing projects with dedicated, user-fee based revenue streams, such as tolls (for highways) or user fees (for mass transit). For this reason, most projects financed through this bill would be commercially owned.

I would like to take a moment to explain each of the four financing mechanisms, or ''products,'' contained in this proposal that would be offered the Department of Transportation (DOT).

Direct loans, the first product, would be subordinated or junior loans that would typically be used to finance about one-third of the cost of a project. The remaining two-thirds of the cost of a project would be provided by private sources (such as loans and municipal bonds). The large private interest will ensure that projects are chosen carefully. The Department of Transportation used this type of loan for the Alameda Corridor project in California.

Under this bill, DOT would also offer stand-by lines of credit. DOT would provide two different forms of this type of credit: partial credit enhancement and a guarantee for the debt service on project debt. Stand-by lines of credit help investors by ensuring that debt is covered during the ramp-up period—the period during which the project is being constructed, but there is no revenue stream such as tolls to repay investors.

The third product can be referred to as insured loans. DOT would be able to provide highly restricted insured loans, which are also called guaranteed loans. These insured loans would cover 100 percent of the principal and interest on the federal portion of the project debt, and only that portion of the debt.

The final product DOT could offer is called development cost loans. This financial product, which is also called risk insurance or speculative loans, would absorb the preliminary costs of projects such as pre-construction costs, preliminary engineering, and environmental impact studies.

Because of limitations on the use of these financial products, the risk to the Department of Transportation is limited. At the same time, use of these mechanisms allows projects to move forward with private sector construction financing.

The total cost of this bill is $500 million over a 5-year period. This $100 million a year would support $2 billion in loans and project insurance each year for 5 years for a total of $10 billion. This proposal is consistent with the goals of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act [ISTEA] reauthorization, and would increase overall highway and mass transit spending.

The legislation also contains a mechanism to back the $100-million-a-year cost of the loans. By using a fraction of the unobligated balances of the Highway Trust Fund—an amount that has reached approximately $10 billion, we can support the budget authority created by this bill. States have been arguing that they should be able to put their unobligated transportation balances toward transportation projects, and this bill creates an exceptional opportunity to use these funds for building highway and mass transit projects.

In light of the limited funding budgeted for the ISTEA reauthorization, this bill makes sense. It is cost effective, it builds public-private partnerships, it creates jobs, and it ensures that highway and mass transit projects are built to serve the public good. I urge my colleagues to join in cosponsoring this important bill.

FRONT PANEL LABELING LEGISLATION

HON. TERRY EVERETT

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 1997

Mr. EVERETT. Mr. Speaker, today, I am introducing legislation on behalf of myself and 34 bipartisan cosponsors, to amend the Tariff Act of 1930 which requires that imported commercial products—including frozen produce packages—be labeled with country-of-origin information.

The U.S. Customs Service has proposed to amend current regulations to ensure a uniform labeling standard by requiring a country-of-origin label to be marked on the front panel of frozen produce packages. However, Customs has failed to implement the regulation.

My legislation merely codifies Customs' proposal and clarifies the term ''conspicuous'' by requiring the label be moved to the front panel. This way, consumers have the necessary information they need to make informed purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, this bill provides an 18-month grace period to provide frozen food packagers with ample time to move the required information to the front of their packages without incurring significant costs.

This legislation is consistent with current law and NAFTA. Remarkably, the Canadian and Mexican Governments require strict labeling requirements to ensure their consumers have the appropriate information about the food they purchase. Surely American consumers deserve the same.

THE BALANCED BUDGET PLAN IS A GOOD DEAL FOR AMERICA

HON. JIM TURNER

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 1997

Mr. TURNER. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to support the budget and tax bills that we are passing this week, fulfilling our commitment to the American people to balance the budget while maintaining our investments in the future. I came to Congress in January with a strong commitment to restoring fiscal responsibility to Washington. Since then, I have seen Democrats and Republicans alike recognizing the need to balance the budget. They have seen that we cannot continue running up debts for our children and grandchildren to pay. They have acknowledged that both parties must work toward solving the problem. This plan is the result of those bipartisan efforts.

At the same time, this bipartisan plan recognizes that the American people need tax relief. We are cutting taxes in ways that will give meaningful relief to working families, family farms, and small businesses.

The $500 tax credit for children will give some help to families that are trying to make ends meet. The tuition tax credits will expand educational opportunities and allow young people to get the education and training they need to succeed in an increasingly competitive economy. The increased exemption from inheritance taxes will let families hand their

farms, ranches, and businesses from one generation to the next without paying outrageous inheritance taxes. The reduction in capital gains taxes will encourage the kind of long-term investment that our country needs to expand economic opportunity and create jobs. And we will do this in the context of a balanced budget. This bipartisan plan gives us a chance to give American taxpayers a break, without breaking the bank.

At the same time, we are making an important commitment to provide health insurance for children. In my home State of Texas, more than 1 million children—23 percent—lack health insurance. This lack of health coverage is risky for children, heartbreaking for parents, and devastating for our country in the long run. Children who do not receive immunizations and other basic preventive care will cost us millions more down the road. Children without adequate health insurance will not get off to the right start in life, and they will not live up to their potential as adults. The funding for children's health insurance is a sound investment in the future of our country.

This bipartisan budget plan proves that we can accomplish a great deal when we work together. We're balancing the budget for the first time in a generation. We're investing in education. We're preserving Medicare. We're extending health insurance to more children. And we're giving real tax relief to American families. This is a great day for this Congress, and for the American people.

TRIBUTE TO THE MOST REVEREND MICHAEL F. McAULIFFE, S.T.D., THE BISHOP OF JEFFERSON CITY

HON. IKE SKELTON

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 1997

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, today, I pay tribute to a dedicated Missouri religious leader, the Most Reverend Michael F. McAuliffe, S.T.D. the bishop of Jefferson City. Bishop McAuliffe is retiring on August 27, 1997 after serving as bishop for 28 years.

Bishop McAuliffe grew up in Kansas City, and studies at the St. Louis Preparatory Seminary and the Theological College of the Catholic University. He was ordained to the priesthood on May 31, 1945. He was the pastor at three parishes in the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, and also served in a number of diocesan positions, including diocesan superintendent of schools. He was also active in community affairs as a member of the Human Relations Commission of the city of Kansas City.

Bishop McAuliffe was ordained as bishop and appointed to lead the Diocese of Jefferson City in 1969. During his tenure, he has been an active religious and community leader. He served as executive chairman of the Missouri Catholic Conference, as chairperson of the Steering Committee of the Missouri Christian Leadership Forum, and as a member of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States, in addition to membership on other boards and committees.

Bishop McAuliffe's dedication to the people of the Diocese of Jefferson City, and his leadership, will be missed. I know the Members of the House will join me and all Missourians in thanking him for his service, and in wishing him a happy and healthy retirement.

CELLULAR INDUSTRY ANSWERS NEWT'S CHALLENGE

HON. NEWT GINGRICH

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, August 1, 1997

Mr. GINGRICH. I want to encourage my colleagues to read the following article by Brian Ekberg from the July edition of Atlanta Consumer Technology.

Two years ago I challenged the wireless telephone industry to become involved in improving the Nation's schools. They responded by creating ClassLink, a program that brings modern communications technology to schools. The first program put cellular telephones in a Washington, DC school. On Wednesday, May 28, the 100th ClassLink hook-up was dedicated at Lockheed Elementary School in Marietta, which is in my district. ClassLink 100, the culmination of the program, will bring together school, community, and industry officials for the dedication at Lockheed. As we approach the 21st century, it is imperative that we look for similar opportunities that increase efficiency and effectiveness in the classroom, the workplace, and the entire society.

[From The Atlanta Consumer Technology, July 1997]

CELLULAR INDUSTRY ANSWERS NEWT'S CHALLENGE

(By Brian Ekberg)

Teachers at Lockheed Elementary School in Marietta won't have to head for the teacher's lounge to make their phone calls anymore. Thanks to a donation from Atlanta's own AirTouch Cellular, the educator's can catch up to the rest of the working world with cellular telephones. They recently celebrated the donations at the school, with representatives from AirTouch, Lockheed Elementary and the sixth district's own Newt Gingrich, ''We're here today because of a challenge two years ago by Newt,'' said Tom Wheeler, president of the Cellular Telephone Industry Association (CTIA).

Wheeler was referring to a challenge Gingrich issued to the telecommunications industry in which he called for industry leaders to take the lead in proving teachers, children and schools with technology to improve the processes of education.

What initially began as a call to technological arms quickly evolved into the ClassLink program. The program found its roots in Washington, D.C. where they conducted the first ClassLink donation at an area elementary school. Twenty-four months later, at a rate of one cellular donation and installation per month, the program has found its 100th school donation right here in Gingrich's own legislative stomping grounds. Besides providing the physical units to the teachers and administrators, the ClassLink program officers other benefits, including:

Increased productivity in the classroom. According to Wheeler, use of the cellular telephone can save teachers as much as 60 minutes per day in administrative time.

Voicemail system that allows teachers to receive important messages in a timely manner.

The ability for teachers and students to find research material quickly. Several teachers have already taken advantage of this function, leaving homework assignments available to children via voicemail (effectively ending the ''I swear we don't have any homework!'' excuse.)

''This really opens up the world,'' said Mary Jo Brubaker, principal of Lockheed Elementary School. Brubaker said it was only logical that they include teachers in the telecommunications boom because, after all, ''The rest of the (business) world has phones.'' According to Brubaker, parents can call the teachers' classrooms directly and leave messages via voicemail. During non-instructional periods, teachers may leave the phones on to field calls from parents. During active instruction time, however, they directly route calls to voicemail.

Wheeler admitted being a bit surprised at the overwhelming response to this program. According to Wheeler, studies conducted by the CTIA have stated that some sort of telephony was at the top of the priority list for secondary education facilities, with laptop computers and Internet connection falling behind. ''Too often we overlook the commonplace in search of the spectacular,'' Wheeler said. ''Here we have the telephone put to proper use, that can have the biggest impact.''

Time is money, as we all know, and Wheeler said the time saved by teachers across the 100 ClassLink programs has amounted to approximately $14 million in educational savings. House Speaker Gingrich was equally pleased with the program's success, calling this and other technology programs ''liberating.'' ''They open up opportunities to focus resources on the kids. We think about the resources that are available today and we realize that we are on a scale of learning that none of us have ever seen before.''

''The future of learning is tied into the Information Age,'' said Gingrich who went on to say that the first 100 schools affected by ClassLink are just the beginning of a nationwide effort to infuse technology into the classroom of the '90s and beyond.

What was Gingrich's next challenge to the high tech industry? In a word: WebTV. Offering schools a low cost gateway to the Internet was the major attractiveness to the product, Gingrich said. Just as cellular phones are beginning to creep into elementary classrooms across the nation, perhaps the next step in this journey is the path to the Web.

CSAT KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT AND APPLICATION GRANTS

HON. JUANITA MILLENDER-McDONALD

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 1997

Ms. MILLENDER-McDONALD. Mr. Speaker, I insert the following letter for the RECORD:

U.S. CONGRESS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, July 25, 1997.

DAVID J. MACTAS,
Director, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, SAMHSA/CSAT, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockwall II Building, Suite 615, Rockville, MD.

DEAR MR. MACTAS: We are writing to express our concerns about attempts that have been made to close down vital Pregnant Postpartum Women and Infants (PPWI) programs despite the fact that the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Subcommittee has provided full funding to continue all of these programs. We are particularly concerned about the Tarzana treatment center, as it has helped numerous