JOBS OUGHT TO BE TOP PRIORITY

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with my colleague from North Carolina that it is time for us to not just reassess but readjust our policies in Afghanistan, scale it down and bring the troops home.

There's another area of consensus that I hope we can focus on: Most people agree that employment, that jobs, ought to be a priority for this Congress, for the government, for American business. Much of what you hear on Capitol Hill about creating jobs and employment is very, very contentious. Yet what is complex and controversial in Congress is not so hard when you move off the Hill, when you look at what the experts suggest, when you look at what the American people will support, for the shape of a future recovery is emerging in terms of a consensus about what we should do. I think we probably will; the question is when.

First and foremost, it is important that we rebalance our long-term programs and priorities. But in the short term, it is not only important to keep the spending levels where they are, it would be disastrous to cut it further. Chairman Bernanke said just last week that short-term increases can strengthen economic demand with a long-term adjustment to strengthen our balance sheet by reducing the deficit.

One of the first places to start is rebuilding and renewing America. Experts agree we have vast unmet needs; the Society of Civil Engineers suggests $2.3 trillion that should be spent in the next 5 years on repairing our roads and our bridges, extending and enhancing our transit system. There are two dozen cities across America that are looking at reintroducing a modern streetcar which can be done quickly and will spark investment in those communities that have that opportunity.

We have aging and inadequate water systems that leak 6 billion gallons of water a day, enough to fill 9,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools that would stretch from Washington, DC, to Pittsburgh. We have an aging and ineffective electrical grid. We have pipelines that need to be upgraded for safety. There is environmental cleanup, especially expensive Superfund sites that otherwise will continue to put a cloud over the adjacent businesses and governments.

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This will create millions of family-wage jobs in the course of the next year. It is important to deal with our health care system, which is creating jobs. But, unfortunately, it's creating jobs now very inefficiently. We pay more for healthcare than anybody else in the world, by far. Compared to what other developed countries produce, we have mediocre results as a whole. Spectacular for some Americans, but overall, Americans die sooner, get sick more often, stay sick longer. By accelerating the health care reforms to provide value instead of volume of health care, we can squeeze more value and the right type of employment that will be sustainable over time and help make Americans healthier.

There is, Mr. Speaker, no question that we need in fact to pay for this over the long term. But the path here is something that most of the American public will in fact agree on, and the experts have a consensus that this is where we start, with tax equity, making sure everybody is paying their fair share adjusting user fees for infrastructure to account for inflation—not anything immediate, but over the course of the next year or two—to be able to have the cash flow to meet our obligations for transportation, for water; reinstituting the Superfund tax that expired in 1995, leaving communities with the toxic legacy.

It's important to consider a financial transaction fee, something that other European countries have—that England has had for over a century—that would in fact give stability to our stock market. This is something that's within our capacity, Mr. Speaker. I hope we do it sooner rather than later.

H.R. 3080, UNITED STATES-KOREA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Alabama (Mrs. ROBY) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. ROBY. I come to the floor today to talk about the need to pass the three free trade agreements that we will be voting on today. These agreements will mean more export opportunities, access to raw materials at a lower cost for American manufacturing, and make American companies and farmers more competitive in additional markets where they currently face high tariffs. Free trade agreements result in jobs and profits for American businesses.

In 2010, the Second District of Alabama saw 4,927 jobs directly supported by exports. Of the $2 billion in total merchandise exports, $769.4 million was to free trade agreement partners. The Korea, Colombia, and Panama free trade agreements will open up opportunities for businesses all over the Nation, including those in my home State of Alabama.

In regards to the Korea free trade and what it means to Alabama, in 2009 Alabama did $300 million in exports to Korea, making Korea the 11th largest export market for Alabama. According to the Business Roundtable, the agreement that we will be voting on today will make more than half of Alabama merchandise exports to Korea be duty free. The immediate tariff eliminations in this bill gives Alabama exports a $3.1 million cost advantage over similar products exported by competitors who do not have free trade agreements with Korea.

Additionally, agriculture in Alabama will benefit from the Korea free trade agreement. Currently, U.S. agricultural products face tariffs up to 500 percent in South Korea. By eliminating these tariffs, agriculture will see over $20.3 million in additional gains in sales to South Korea. In particular, it is estimated that Alabama's export of poultry will rise to $4.4 million per year, and cattle and beef to $3.7 million per year.

In regards to the Colombia free trade agreement, in 2010, Colombia was Alabama's 21st largest export market, with $154 million in exports. The agreement we will be voting on today will mean an estimated 72.3 percent increase in exports for Alabama to Colombia and 56.4 percent in fabricated metal products.

And finally, Panama is one of the fastest expanding economies in Latin American. In 2010, the United States saw a 7.5 percent growth in exports to Panama. In regards to agriculture, the United States exported more than $450 million to Panama in 2010.

The free trade agreements that we are voting on today are in total expected to increase direct agricultural exports from Alabama by $22.8 million per year, and the increased marketing opportunities will add more than 200 jobs to the Alabama economy. It is unfortunate that these agreements have taken so long to be considered by Congress. They will have a significant impact on our economy. This delay has already put American businesses at a disadvantage with the South Korea-European Union free trade agreement going into effect in July of this year.

American businesses do not need a stimulus or stimulus programs that do not work. I have come to the floor several times to talk about how American businesses are being stifled by overreaching and burdensome regulations. American businesses have also been stifled by the slow-moving administration and ensuring that our businesses have the same advantages as those in other countries. These agreements remove the high tariffs that have been in place in important and expanding markets.

I will continue to work to protect and promote jobs here in the United States and in my home State of Alabama and will be voting ''yes'' on all three trade agreements. I ask my colleagues to do so as well.

IN OPPOSITION TO THE TRADE AGREEMENTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. KISSELL) for 5 minutes.

Mr. KISSELL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak of the opposition that I will have to the free trade agreements that we'll be voting on today and to