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House of Representatives

The House met at noon and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. MESSER).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
June 15, 2015.

I hereby appoint the Honorable LUKE MESSER to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

JOHN A. BOEHNER,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 6, 2015, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 1:50 p.m.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, the strange kaleidoscope of this congressional session began with the proposed shutdown of Homeland Security but moved on to the bipartisan action to fix the vexing SGR-Medicare funding formula, the so-called ''doc fix'' to prevent dramatic cuts to providers.

Yes, it is still hard to overcome deep divisions, philosophical difference, and some real serious politics. The heated rhetoric and convoluted voting on the recent trade package is the latest example. Wouldn't it be great if we could take a step back and find ways to unite us to solve a major problem?

Well, we have got a major problem that is staring us in the face right now. We are in the midst of the 33rd short-term transportation funding extension that is a result of our inability to pay for 2015 infrastructure with 1993 dollars. That is because of our inability to raise the gas tax since 1993.

The demands for transportation solutions grow, and the harm inflicted on families occurs every day. It costs them over $300 a year just in damage to their cars from road maintenance that has fallen apart. We are paying a $125-billion-a-year penalty for congestion.

Americans, make no mistake, are paying the price for this dysfunction, and the people who are partners at the State and local level and in the private sector are having great difficulty doing their part without the certainty of the Federal partnership that has been the bedrock, that has been the foundation of national transportation policy since President Eisenhower.

Now, there is a little hint of sunshine here because this week, on Wednesday, we will be having the first hearing on transportation finance since my Republican friends took control of Congress 56 months ago.

What if we took advantage of that daylight to expand the scope of the discussion? What if we were able to have at the same witness table the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Tom Donohue, and the president of the AFL–CIO, Richard Trumka, who don't much agree on anything, but they are united in their firm belief that raising the gas tax, getting the transportation funding to rebuild and renew America, is absolutely essential?

We could be joined by people who understand that hundreds of thousands of family-wage jobs would be possible if we met our transportation obligations.

We could have representatives from State and local government, transit agencies, the environmental community, safety advocates all joined at the same table. We could have the eloquence of Governor Bill Graves, who is currently president of the American Trucking Association, but he was Republican Governor of Kansas, who raised the gas tax not once, but twice. He could be joined by the American Automobile Association, which has come out strongly in favor of a gas tax to be able to meet the needs of the motoring public. Why wouldn't we want those people there?

We could invite State legislators from six very red Republican States—Idaho, Utah, Georgia, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Iowa—that all raised the gas tax this year. They didn't just talk about it; they acted. Six red States raising the gas tax already in 2015.

I am optimistic that we can capitalize on the glimmers of life we are seeing. If we can just listen to the people at the State and local level, the private sector, organized labor, people who build, maintain, and use our transportation system, they could be part of that deliberative process. I am confident that we, in Congress, could develop a united front on an issue that has been controversial in the past but is no longer.

When people step up, when they accept responsibility and work cooperatively, we can do what was done in Idaho, Georgia, Utah, Iowa, South Dakota, and Nebraska. Congress can do that. And after all the acrimony and bad feeling and partisan division that has lingered, wouldn't this be the right time to do so?

PIVOT TO AMERICA

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

Mr. RUSSELL. Mr. Speaker, Congress has a chance this week to turn

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the President's pivot to Asia into a pivot to America. The question is: Will we listen to the American people, or will we double down on a watered-down policy that has divided both the Democratic and Republican sides of the aisle? To stop the TPA, we must hold firm.

Republicans and Democrats all want trade barriers to be removed, but we are at a crossroads because both parties have voiced a lack of trust in the President's ability to be able to negotiate what is best for America. That is why we are still fighting to stop the trade promotional authority, better known as fast track.

Fast track will not be the panacea of all ills. In fact, if granted, we could see President Obama move swiftly on the Trans-Pacific Partnership that will likely not deliver the goods and have harmful secondary effects in multiple areas.

Dr. Aurolyn Luykx, from the University of Texas at El Paso, makes this analysis: ''I think the consequences could be very dire. We already saw under NAFTA how so many jobs left the United States and, also, went from Mexico. Then we saw, as well, tens of thousands of low-income Mexican families being put out of work and losing their land, and we saw how that drove migration to the United States.''

The architects of the TPA in both Congress and the White House claim that with fast track they can lower barriers on U.S. exports among the 11 other TPP nations in the negotiation, thus, increasing jobs and wages.

Now to the facts. We already have high-standard, free-trade agreements with 7 of those 11 other nations in the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership. We are writing the rules in the Pacific. Let's write them some more with good bilateral agreements.

If you don't believe me, how about Simon Johnson, a former chief economist of the International Monetary Fund and a professor at MIT Sloan. Here is what he says about the myth of needing the TPA to lower tariffs among the proposed members of the Trans-Pacific Partnership:

> Almost all tariffs on trade among Canada, Mexico, and the United States are long gone. Under the Australian and Singapore free trade agreements, almost all tariffs on U.S. goods have been eliminated. Goods from the United States have entered Chile without tariffs since January 1 of this year, and most tariffs imposed by Peru have already been phased out.
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> The TPP will amount to a free trade agreement with Brunei, with a population less than Omaha, Nebraska, and New Zealand, with a population less than Louisiana. Encouraging exports to these countries is surely desirable, but the economic impact on the United States is unlikely to be more than a rounding error.
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> That leaves three larger countries where the issues are more complex: Japan, Malaysia, and Vietnam.
>
> And TPP will also confer special status on foreign investors, allowing them to sue for financial judgments against host-country regulations. Creating a quasi-legal process outside the regular court system just for foreigners can go wrong in many ways.

I would add, from my own reading of the TPP, without divulging the details, concerns about private rights in disputes; the transnational panel empowered with a living agreement even after the accord is signed; and possible exceptions granted to Brunei, whose legal system is not to the same standard as other nations.

So, one says, What solutions do you have? Well, here are a couple:

First, listen to the American people. If the majority of Americans completely across the political spectrum have voiced concerns against TPA, then our actions this week will truly reflect if we are being representative of that voice.

Second, the President must demonstrate he can lead on foreign policy. He has yet to do it. Granting fast track to negotiate with 40 percent of the world's economy should be based on how well he has handled foreign policy. Have we forgotten the handling of Syria, ISIS, Iraq, Crimea, Ukraine, and Iran? I can go on, but the question is, Why are we? The President must show us some deeds, not words. He should start by negotiating a bilateral agreement with our ally Japan. Intently focus there. Bring that to us, and we will likely approve it.

Third, negotiate an interim agreement with China. We still have much to do with raising the standards bar on Chinese trade, but China lacks lawyers to fight these problems. Well, do we know how to make plenty of those. Negotiate a law school program all across our land's rich institutions to create Chinese attorneys to help fight these issues.

As to goods, China is seeking oil, natural gas, coal, timber, aggregate, beef, and pork. We have an abundance of these. How about a trade agreement on these narrow products that will immediately benefit us all?

It is not impossible. We have the resource. We have the technology. What we need are the guts to do it, a rekindling of the American spirit, and the leadership to get it done. It starts by putting the brakes on fast track. We need the right track instead.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

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

Mr. MCNERNEY. Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, I am going to talk about campaign finance reform.

First of all, though, I want to say that the United States of America is the greatest country in the world. You can see by our economic dominance, by our cultural dominance, and by our military power. But we face some very big challenges. Unless we are able to tackle those challenges, our dominance may be in peril.

Some of those challenges are climate change, global competitiveness. We need to make sure our manufacturing is up to par and can compete with any country on Earth. We have a vanishing middle class, which is very devastating to our country. We have a crumbling infrastructure. We also need to work on our educational system. But I can tell you, it is very difficult to attack any of these problems in a serious way with the current system of campaign financing.

So let me go over some of the problems with campaign financing in our current system:

First of all, you can see on the list here, campaign financing makes elected officials less effective because of the amount of time that we must spend raising money for the next election, which leaves less time to work on the issues that need to move our country forward.

The campaign money fuels negative campaign ads that turn off voters and suppress vote turnout.

Campaign financing causes wasteful government spending on programs that big donors want to see out there.

The threat of negative campaign adds—and this is very corrosive—causes elected officials to avoid taking stands and leadership on important issues, and this reduces the effectiveness of our government institutions.

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Nowadays, even our judicial races are becoming expensive and tainted by the influence of money.

Next, people have become cynical about the government and disillusioned about the United States of America because, in part, of negative advertising.

Next, the super-PACs and dark money coming into campaigns are no longer controlled by the candidates on the ballot.

Lastly—and I think this is very important—excessive election spending drowns out free speech. If you look at campaign ads, what is happening is that the Big Money comes in, buys all the campaign ad time on TV, and floods our mailboxes with literature.

People are only going to listen to so much campaign rhetoric, so they turn it off. The people with the most money are the ones who are listened to, and the ideas of the folks without much money are never heard. They don't ever get very far. I think this is a very critical issue.

We see the problems that we have with the current system; but how do we change it? There are some very big challenges that we face in terms of changing the current campaign financing system.

First of all, the Supreme Court of the United States of America has shown a very strong bias in the last decade or so toward putting more money in politics. That is right. The Supreme Court has made it so that more money is coming into politics and election campaigns every single year.

The Citizens United decision by the Supreme Court ruled that corporations