

basic job as Members of the Congress. It is not particularly attractive or sexy or interesting, but it is about competence, it is about doing our job, and it is about putting the American people's interests first.

So I hope by tomorrow our colleagues will have had a chance to satisfy themselves and understand the pay-fors in this bill, recognizing that most of this information has been out there in the public domain for a long, long time. I am not asking them to like it, I am not asking them to fall in love with the pay-fors, but I am asking them to let us go forward and to let the Senate be the Senate. Let people offer their ideas, hopefully get votes on constructive suggestions, eventually pass this legislation, and send it over to the House, where I predict, if it comes out of the Senate with a good strong vote, our friends in the House will take it up and pass it and send it to the President, and we will have fulfilled our responsibility.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, let me add my voice to this bipartisan chorus. It is embarrassing to the United States of America that we are now in the midst of our 33rd short-term extension of the highway trust fund.

This 60-day extension ends in 10 days. It is true and the Senator from Texas is correct that many of us have come to the floor and said this is beneath the dignity of a great nation—that we cannot invest in our own economy, in our own business growth. Building the highways and bridges and the mass transit that sustains a great nation takes a determined long-term effort.

Now, there are those—not on our side of the aisle, but there are those—who question whether the Federal Government should be involved in this at all. The so-called devolution movement argues, I understand, that this really should be a State and local matter: Get the Federal Government out of the business of planning the transportation grid for America.

I have three words for those people who believe that: Dwight David Eisenhower, a Republican President who, in the 1950s, had the vision and determination, once he had seen the autobahn in Germany, to say that the United States of America needs an interstate highway system for its national defense. That is how he sold it. He sold it to a bipartisan Congress, and we have lived with that benefit ever since.

Our generation and even those before us have inherited the vision of that President and Members of Congress who said: Let us invest in the long-term development of America.

Think about your own home State and what interstate highways mean to your economy. In my State, if you are a town lucky enough to live next to an interstate, you are bound to have a good economy. And if you are blessed

with the intersection of two interstates, hold on tight, because the opportunities are limitless.

So that generation 60 years ago had a vision. The question is, Do we have a vision? We certainly don't with 60-day extensions with the highway trust fund. That is why when Senator MCCONNELL on the Republican side offered a long-term approach, 3 years—I wish it were 6—but 3 years actually paid for, I believe we should take it seriously.

One Senator among us, Senator BOXER of California, did. As chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee, BARBARA BOXER rolled up her sleeves and started negotiating, crafting an agreement.

How about this for an assignment. We said to Senator BOXER: Come up with a long-term highway trust fund bill, get it through four different committees to the satisfaction of at least the majority of the 45 other Democratic Senators, work out your differences, and report to us in 10 days. She did. I have to give credit to her, as big as this bill may be—and by Senate standards it is one of the larger ones—it was an undertaking she took seriously and we should take seriously too. Now that we have the bill, there is no excuse. There is plenty of time to read this. Don't believe that every word on every page is valuable, but let's go through it carefully and make sure we understand completely what we are doing before we vote. That was the cloture vote we had earlier today.

When I went home over this weekend and called leaders in my State—I called the CEOs of two major corporations, I called the labor unions, I called the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and they were over the moon and happy with the notion that we are finally going to come up with at least a 3-year highway trust fund bill.

I will be reading this carefully. In the course of reading it, I hope I can come to the conclusion that this is the right answer to move us forward to build our infrastructure for the next generation.

NUCLEAR AGREEMENT WITH IRAN

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, when President Obama came to office, he looked out at the threats across America, and there were four hard-target threats: Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran. The situation in Iran was particularly worrisome because there was a recurrent belief that Iran was developing nuclear weapons. I have heard critics ask: Well, what difference would it make? How foolish would it be for Iran to launch a nuclear weapon against anyone? Every nuclear weapon that is launched has a return address, and that country will pay dearly for a reckless decision such as that. But the fear the President had and we shared was that if Iran developed a nuclear weapon in the Middle East, it would trigger an arms race, and many other countries in that volatile region of the

world would then seek to develop their own nuclear weapons and the potential conflagration was incredible.

There was also a concern that one of the first targets of Iran would be our close ally and friend, the nation of Israel. It is easy to reach that conclusion when you read and hear the rhetoric of the rightwing in Iran, which will not even recognize Israel's right to exist. President Obama set out to do something about it.

It was clear from our experience in Iraq and Afghanistan that sending in American troops was something that had to be thought about long and hard. We have the best military in the world, but let's face it, what we faced in Iraq with roadside bombs maimed and killed so many American soldiers that we realized this new world of asymmetric military confrontation didn't guarantee that the best military in the world would have an easy time of it.

We ended up with almost 5,000 casualties in Iraq and nearly 3,000 now in Afghanistan, and Afghanistan turned out to be the longest war in U.S. history. This President and the American people were reluctant to face another military confrontation.

This President made a decision. I have talked to him about it. He decided every leader from every country who came in to see him would be asked to join in an effort to impose sanctions on Iran to bring them to the negotiating table over the issue of their nuclear capability.

The President put together an incredible coalition because we learned long ago unilateral sanctions are not worth much, but if you can bring many nations around the world into a common purpose of putting the pressure on a country, it can have a positive impact.

The coalition the President put together was amazing; witness the negotiations themselves where China and Russia were sitting at the same side of the table as the United States and the European Union—England and France—and many other countries joined us in imposing these economic sanctions when they had little to gain and a lot to lose when it came to the oil resources of Iran. The President's determination to put the sanctions on Iran was for the purpose of bringing them to the negotiating table. That diplomatic gathering would literally have been the first meeting in 35 years between Iran and the United States, representing that period of time when our relationship with Iran had reached its lowest possible point. At this point, the goal of the negotiation was very clear: stop Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

How real was the threat that they were developing such a weapon? If you go back in time and read the quotes from the Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu, for years—more than 10 years—he has been warning that the Iranians were close to developing a nuclear weapon. It was a matter of weeks, months, a year at the

most by most of his estimates. Of course, Israel, more concerned than most about the nuclear threat, warned the world of what would happen if Iran developed a nuclear weapon.

Last week, after lengthy negotiations, the President announced with Iran and the others who sat at the table—P5+1, as they are known in shorthand—that they had reached an agreement with Iran.

It was interesting to watch the reaction of Members of Congress. There were some Members of Congress who condemned that agreement before it was even released to the public. You see, 47 Members of the other side in the Senate had sent a letter to the Ayatollah in Iran during the course of negotiations, before any agreement was reached, warning him and his nation not to negotiate with this President of the United States.

That was unprecedented. That had never happened before in American history—when a political party reached out to a sworn enemy of the United States and gave them advice not to speak to our leader. That letter went on to say that even though you think you reached an agreement between Iran and the United States, don't be misled; ultimately, Congress would have the last word on that agreement.

It was no surprise in that environment that so many Senators and Congressmen from the other side of the aisle instantaneously condemned this agreement. Some of us decided to take a little time and perhaps reflect on it, read it, and reach out to people who were involved in it.

I took last week to read the 100-plus pages of this agreement and to talk further to our Nation's top experts, including the Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz, Secretary of State John Kerry, and others, about this agreement, hoping I could come to understand exactly what was being offered by way of stopping Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

I am under no illusions about the Iranian regime. Its support for terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas is well documented, its abysmal human rights record is well known, and its brutal suppression of its own people during the 2009 election in Iran is well documented.

Iran also continues to hold a number of Americans on outrageous charges, including Amir Hekmati, Saeed Abedini, and the Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian.

I joined a few years ago, in 2007, with Republican Senator Gordon Smith in introducing the Iran Counter-Proliferation Act—key components of which became the basis for a strict petroleum sanctions regime that helped bring Iran to the negotiating table.

I voted for all the key sanctions bills against Iran, and I have tried to be a consistent voice for increasing military assistance to Israel. When I chaired the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, I was proud to double

the Iron Dome funding request of Israel for their own defense of their nation.

The agreement before us is a comprehensive solution to the nuclear weapons issue with Iran. Without a nuclear weapon to embolden Iran, the agreement allows the United States and its allies to better deter Iran's destabilizing actions.

Let's take a reflective moment and look at the history—recent history—in the United States. Strong leaders and nations such as the United States meet and talk to their enemies and negotiate when it is in their national interest.

It was John Kennedy who said: "We should never negotiate out of fear, but we should never fear to negotiate."

These kinds of negotiations aren't an example of weakness but in most cases are an example of strength, and sometimes the benefits aren't obvious immediately; they are realized over time. It is simply common sense. It has been the practice of this Nation, America, for generations, regardless of who is President, to meet and try to negotiate for a more peaceful world. Throughout our history, American leaders have successfully and aggressively used diplomacy, Presidents of both political parties.

In 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis. We faced the prospect of a nuclear war, a standoff with the nation, where we knew and they knew they had the capacity to detonate a nuclear weapon in the United States. Few realize how close we came to a nuclear confrontation.

There were many hawks in Washington during President John Kennedy's administration who said let's take them on. Some even suggested a full invasion of Cuba, but John Kennedy wisely pursued a careful balance of strength and diplomacy, using a blockade and negotiations to bring us back from the brink.

Few people knew the Kennedy administration was secretly negotiating with the Soviets while the Cuban Missile Crisis was unfolding, and ultimately President Kennedy agreed to remove American nuclear-armed Jupiter missiles from Turkey and Italy as part of an agreement that Soviet Premier Khrushchev remove Soviet nuclear missiles from Cuba.

Are we going to say now in reflection that John Kennedy should never have negotiated during this crisis because the Soviets were out to destabilize the world and to spread communism?

Let's not forget when John Kennedy entered into this negotiation, the Soviet Union had not only placed nuclear missiles in Cuba—they were in the process of placing them—but it was occupying Eastern Europe and trying to spread communism around the world. The bloody Korean war, where my two brothers served in the U.S. Navy, was a war in which the Soviets helped the North Koreans against the United States. Yet we sat down and negotiated with the Soviet Union.

Fast forward a few years. In 1972, then-President Nixon traveled to Communist Red China to begin establishing normalized relations. China wasn't a friend of the United States. It was a key supporter of the North Vietnamese, who were ruthlessly fighting and killing U.S. forces in Vietnam at that same time.

In fact, during Nixon's visit with then-Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, China was sending more weapons to the North Vietnamese. This was happening even while Nixon was asking China to end its support for the North Vietnamese.

China's regime was also fomenting Communist revolutionary movements in Asia, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand—all against the U.S. interests.

Domestically, in China, Chinese leader Mao Zedong had persecuted millions of his own people as part of the brutal Cultural Revolution. I recognize, as President Nixon did then, that it is hard to enter into negotiations with a regime as nefarious as China, and just as with Iran today, many conservatives denounced Republican President Nixon for doing so. However, as China's sphere of influence grew and relations between the United States and the Soviet Union deteriorated, many in both parties—including President Nixon—recognized it was time to change.

Nelson Rockefeller, President Nixon's rival for the Republican nomination in 1968, called for more contact and communication. It was former Vice President Hubert Humphrey, a Democrat, who proposed the building of bridges to the people of mainland China. Then-Senator Ted Kennedy recognized President Nixon's diplomatic efforts toward China as a "magnificent gesture." Other Members of the Democratic-controlled Congress agreed.

There was a time when foreign policy was bipartisan. There was a time when Democrats would speak up defending a Republican President, even when the most conservative Members of his own party were condemning him.

Over time, President Nixon's decision paid dividends in America's interest. China moderated its foreign policy and established better relations with our country.

These relations aren't perfect, but we know we made progress and we are in negotiations. China sat with us on the same side of the table trying to stop Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

More recently in the late 1980s, President Ronald Reagan began discussions with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev on the possibility of nuclear arms reductions. It was inconceivable when those talks started in October of 1986 that they could really negotiate. Who would imagine that these two countries, the United States and the Soviet Union, with thousands of nuclear warheads pointed at one another, could actually sit down and reach an agreement limiting the use of nuclear weapons? The Cold War was far from over at that time.

In 1979 Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan and continued to attempt to spread communism. That led President Carter to halt efforts to negotiate the SALT II Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty. The list of Soviet aggression at that moment in time was lengthy. Yet it was President Ronald Reagan who said he would sit down and negotiate with the Soviet Union.

I have an excerpt here from the January 17, 1988, New York Times about the opposition Ronald Reagan faced in negotiating an arms agreement with the Soviet Union. It may sound familiar to what we are hearing today about President Obama's efforts in Iran.

Already, right-wing groups . . . have mounted a strong campaign against the INF treaty. They have mailed out close to 300,000 letters opposing it. They have circulated 5,000 cassette recordings of Gen. Bernard Rogers, former Supreme Commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, attacking it. And finally, they are preparing to run newspaper ads this month savaging Reagan as a new Neville Chamberlain, signing an accord with Hitler and gullibly predicting "peace for our time."

These were conservative Republican critics of President Ronald Reagan, who was negotiating with the Soviet Union to try to limit the spread of nuclear weapons and was being likened to Neville Chamberlain. Does that sound familiar?

In May of 1987, the conservative National Review magazine had a cover with the title "Reagan's Suicide Pact."

President Reagan eventually agreed with then-Secretary of State Schultz that arms control could and would improve U.S. national security.

In December of 1987, Reagan and Gorbachev signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, committing the two superpowers to eliminate all of their nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometers. This treaty, the Reagan-Gorbachev Soviet Union arms control treaty, was one of the first to rely on extensive onsite negotiations for verification.

Do you remember who coined the phrase "trust but verify"? It was Ronald Reagan in his negotiations with the Soviet Union. It took 5 months after Ronald Reagan reached this agreement for this Chamber to vote 93 to 5 in favor of that treaty at a time when the Democrats had a majority. I could go through the long list of Democratic Senators who supported President Ronald Reagan in his efforts to try to create a more peaceful world.

Ultimately, because of that agreement, more than 2,000 short-, medium-, and intermediate-range missiles were destroyed. Our relationship with the Soviet Union didn't improve overnight, and we certainly still have our problems with them today. But going back to what I said earlier, the Russians sat on the same side of the table as the United States in this negotiation for this agreement to end the threat, or at least delay the threat, of nuclear power and nuclear weapons in Iran.

Imagine if 47 Senators, during the course of Ronald Reagan's negotiation with Gorbachev, had written in the middle of those negotiations to Mr. Gorbachev and said: Ignore President Ronald Reagan; don't negotiate with him because we are not going to accept it here in Congress. If that had happened, there would have been cries of treason for sending that kind of letter. It didn't happen. Those were the days when there was a bipartisan approach to foreign policy in the United States.

Today we have a chance and an opportunity with Iran that hasn't presented itself for more than 30 years—the opportunity to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. It is not going to solve all the problems with Iran overnight, but it does solve, I believe, one critical problem. The agreement retains U.S. freedom of action to counter Iran in any part of the world.

After all, if Ronald Reagan didn't stop trying to counter Soviet actions after negotiating an arms treaty with Gorbachev, President Obama will not and should not stop working to diminish Iran's influence after this agreement.

I am under no illusions that for some period Iran did pursue a nuclear bomb. If that had happened, it would have been disastrous. And I am under no illusions that Iran lied in the past about these efforts. I know they did. But the agreement reached last week provides unprecedented safeguards and inspections to prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons now or in the future.

The United States and its allies are strong enough to enter into this agreement, not because Iran is suddenly trustworthy or an open democracy but because it serves our national security interests to do it.

Secretary of State John Kerry, Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz, and Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman negotiated this agreement with a single focus: Prevent Iran from getting any closer to obtaining a nuclear weapon. They achieved that goal, and that is why I am supporting this effort by the President to bring a more stable and peaceful situation to the Middle East.

To appreciate the magnitude of their challenge, let's step back and take stock of Iran's nuclear weapons program as it is today before this agreement goes in place. Iran currently has enough nuclear material to make 10 nuclear weapons. It has more than 19,000 centrifuges, many of which are more advanced and powerful. Immediately prior to the interim agreement with the P5+1, Iran was enriching its uranium to 20 percent. The breakout time—the time it would take for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon—was estimated to be 3 months. It was an incredibly large and dangerous nuclear capability, growing at a significant rate, and virtually unconstrained. That is what this President inherited from the previous administration.

But thanks to this effort, this agreement cuts off every single one of Iran's

potential pathways to a bomb. It shrinks major portions of their nuclear infrastructure. It eliminates many parts of it. It extends the breakout time to at least 1 year. Should Iran renege on this and decide they are going forward with a nuclear weapon, we believe that under this agreement it will take them at least a year to achieve it—a year in which we can put pressure and more, if necessary.

The agreement reduces Iran's uranium stockpile by 98 percent, cuts its number of centrifuges by more than two-thirds, and for the next 15 years, caps its enrichment at 3.67 percent. It prevents Iran's underground facility at Fordow from being used for uranium enrichment.

Iran is required to change its heavy water reactor at Arak so that it can no longer produce weapons-grade plutonium. How will we know? Because we are helping to design and to monitor the fuel in and out of this facility and verifying it every step of the way.

All of us have deep suspicions about Iran's nuclear ambitions, and we should. What if they try to build a secret facility? Well, our negotiating team, led by an extraordinary man, Secretary of Energy Moniz, designed a verification plan with no exits. Our team thought long and hard over the last 2 years about how we might be able to stop cheating. For every potential technique, they embedded a countermeasure in the text of the agreement.

This weekend Secretary Moniz explained that it would be "virtually impossible" to hide nuclear activities under this agreement. It is the strongest nuclear verification system ever imposed on a peaceful nation. Its end result is that Iran will not be able to do anything of significance without being caught. And going back to Ronald Reagan, our inspectors will be on the ground.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent for 5 additional minutes.

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

Mr. DURBIN. This agreement requires the IAEA to have 24/7 access to all of Iran's declared nuclear facilities. This means in-person inspectors, remote cameras, tamperproof seals—all of the world's most sophisticated detection technologies. As one nuclear expert commented last week, "If a rat enters a nuclear facility [in Iran], we will know it."

Critically, this intrusive monitoring goes all the way into the nuclear supply chain, from uranium mines to centrifuge production. We cover it all in this agreement.

It will allow IAEA inspectors to follow every ounce of uranium from the ground to its final destination, and every piece of nuclear infrastructure from its creation to its use. If Iran

tries to divert anything to a covert facility, we will know.

This agreement also sets up a dedicated procurement channel. Any dual-use item Iran wants to purchase from the international community must go through this channel.

The U.S. and its allies have a veto over such purchases. It makes it almost impossible for Iran to import anything of benefit to a nuclear weapons program.

Lastly, Iran must also abide by the Additional Protocol forever. This allows the IAEA to have access to non-nuclear sites in a timely fashion, in as little as 2 hours. The agreement also requires any disputes over access to these non-nuclear sites to be resolved in short order. If not, Iran would be in violation of its commitments and sanctions could quickly snap back.

Critics have complained about the time period our nuclear experts negotiated. But as Secretary Moniz and many others with Ph.D.'s have pointed out, uranium has a half-life of 4.5 billion years. It doesn't disappear like invisible ink. It cannot be cleaned up in a matter of weeks. If Iran cheats, we will know.

President Reagan was correct to negotiate with the Soviets when there were strategic openings and President Obama is doing the same thing with the Iranians. The potential benefits of this deal are too significant, and the costs of not doing so too high, to just walk away.

If we walked away, the international sanctions regime would crumble and Iran would have few if any restrictions on its program. Imposing more sanctions or simply bombing Iran today would create an even greater security risk to the region.

In fact, if we bombed Iran today, it would almost certainly withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and kick out inspectors. As soon as that happens, Iran's nationalistic backlash would almost assure that the regime would build a nuclear bomb. Over the longer term, if Iran were to fail or cheat despite its international commitment, we retain the right to use military force and we would be in a much better position internationally to do so. And accepting this deal does nothing to stop the U.S. and allied efforts from countering Iran's behavior elsewhere in the world. Key sanctions on Iran's support for terrorist groups will remain in place. Our support for regional allies will remain strong, if not stronger. And, critically, an Iran determined to destabilize parts of the Middle East with a nuclear weapon in its arsenal, will no longer be an option.

No doubt this is why some 60 of the most respected names in foreign policy, Democrats and Republicans alike, recently wrote in support of this agreement. Those signing included Secretary of State Madeleine Albright; Secretary of Defense William Perry; Secretary of the Treasury Paul O'Neill; National Security Advisors Zbigniew

Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft; Under Secretaries of State Nicholas Burns and Thomas Pickering; U.S. Ambassadors Ryan Crocker and Stuart Eizenstat; U.S. Senators Tom Daschle, Carl Levin, George Mitchell, Nancy Landon Kassebaum, and many others. We should do the same and support this agreement in the Senate.

I see the Senator from South Dakota is here, and I will wrap up.

Let me conclude. When I sat down to read this agreement—and I don't know how many of my colleagues have—I was struck on the third page with this statement in the agreement with Iran: Iran reaffirms that under no circumstances will Iran ever seek, develop or acquire any nuclear weapon. That is quite a statement. It was our goal at this negotiation. Do I believe it? Some, but I have my doubts. That is why we had to have an inspections regime from the Iranian mines right through the production facilities. That is why we had to dramatically cut back on their capacity to build weapons-grade fuel, and that is why this agreement is now—most of the countries believe—moving us in the right direction in Iran.

There are critics. We heard a lot of them here in the Senate. There isn't a single critic who has stepped up with a better idea. They said: Well, let's go back to the sanctions regime. The countries that joined us in that sanctions regime did it to bring Iran to the negotiating table, and it worked. They now have an agreement they believe in and we should believe in too. To think that we are going to renew sanctions or place unilateral sanctions—that to me is not likely to occur if Iran lives up to the terms of this agreement.

I will add the other alternative. We know the cost of war. We know it in human lives, we know it in the casualties that return, and we know it in the cost to the American people. Given a choice between the invasion of Iran or working in a diplomatic fashion toward a negotiation so we can lessen this threat in the world, I think President Obama made the right choice.

I support this administration's decision to go forward with this agreement. I will be adding my vote to the many in the Senate in the hopes that we can see a new day dawning and in the hopes too that like President Nixon and President Reagan and even like other Presidents before us who have sat down to negotiate with our enemies, at the end of the day we will be a safer and stronger nation because of it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

THE HIGHWAY BILL

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I will speak about the Iran nuclear agreement in just a moment. But before I do that, I will briefly talk about the legislation before us on the floor, and that is the reauthorization of the highway

bill, which is something we have to do on a fairly regular basis around here. Every so many years the authority to spend out of the highway trust fund expires, and we can't fund the infrastructure needs that our country has in terms of roads, bridges, construction, maintenance, and all of those things that are so important to our competitive economy.

This week we have an opportunity to do something that hasn't been done around here in a long time, and that is to fund a multiyear highway bill. The reason that is important is because people who rely upon highway funding that comes through the highway trust fund need to be able to make plans. State departments of transportation, those who are involved in the construction, such as contractors, and all the people who are involved and the jobs that are associated with this process need the certainty that comes with a long-term bill.

Today I was told that there have been 33 short-term extensions over the last few years since the last long-term highway bill was passed. I believe, somewhere around the 2005 timeframe. I was part of that. I was a member of the Environment and Public Works Committee at the time. I worked on highway bills as far back as my days in the House of Representatives, when I served on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. This is something that we have to do here on a regular basis if we are going to ensure that we have a competitive infrastructure in this country suitable to moving people and goods in a way that keeps our economy moving forward and growing. That is why, in my view, when we have an opportunity to get a multiyear bill, we shouldn't pass on it.

If we continue to pass 6-month and 1-year extensions, all we are simply doing is kicking the can down the road. I would say that 33 short-term extensions is not a very good way to run a railroad and certainly not a very good way to run a highway program.

I know there are going to be differences. The committee that I chair, the commerce committee, was involved with marking up portions of the highway bill that pertained to highway safety and some railroad provisions and other items that would be included in this bill. We worked on that through the weekend, and I think we addressed many of the concerns that Members on both sides had, and I feel very good about where that part of the bill is. I worked as a member of the Finance Committee and tried to find ways to pay for this.

If we can get a multiyear bill in place that provides the certainty, the predictability, and the reliability that we need in our highway funding process in this country, it would be a very good thing. As we all know, it is incredibly important to economic growth and to jobs. The certainty that comes with a long-term bill is something that we all ought to strive for.