

CIO and/or the trade unions that build our infrastructure, the message was always the same.

First of all, it was a recognition of the obvious: bridges are falling down, trains are coming off the track. It is tragic and costly in terms of dollars and loss of life.

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Secondly, it was pointed out by everybody that this failure is handicapping our economy—our ability to expand business, to create jobs, and to grow our economy.

Thirdly, everyone testified that we need a long-term surface transportation legislation so that States, communities, and our Federal transportation officials can do the kind of planning that is necessary to build the kind of transportation system that is needed for a strong economy.

Lastly, I want to point out that this legislation before us here today is the product of what has come to be known as regular order; namely, the process where important legislation for the country is brought before the appropriate committees and the committees and all the members of that committee have an opportunity to offer any ideas, any amendments that they want that they think will improve, in this case, our surface transportation system.

The fact of the matter is we have hundreds of amendments, and that committee, on which I am proud to serve, examined and considered every single one of those amendments.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to remind ourselves here that democracy is a long, arduous, and difficult process, but when you allow the members of a committee who have spent enormous amounts of time getting smart and knowledgeable about the responsibilities of that committee to come together, to offer their ideas, to have them thoroughly examined, and to have them thoroughly debated is how you find common ground. That is how you come together. That is how you build and develop respect for one another, and that is what has happened in the development of this surface transportation bill that we have before us here today.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the committee, and I congratulate the Congress for recognizing how important and how valuable regular order can be to the process of restoring people's confidence in the ability of the Congress of the United States to fix things, get things done, and end the gridlock. Thank you, my fellow colleagues.

REFORMING OUR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

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

Mr. DOLD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about an issue that we don't talk about nearly enough. Our country's imperfect criminal justice system

is affecting not only the people in my district but also communities all across our Nation.

Every year the Federal Government spends more than a half trillion dollars on anti-poverty programs. The numbers show that these initiatives have not solved the problem. Today there are nearly 50 million Americans living in poverty. Over the last decade, the number of Americans living in our Nation's most impoverished communities—where at least 40 percent of the families live below the poverty line—has nearly doubled to a historic high of 14 million.

Meanwhile, the United States prison and jail population has reached an all-time high, and the number of people on probation and parole has literally doubled. This is not a coincidence, but the numbers don't even begin to tell the real story.

Solving this problem requires meaningful action and change—two things I would argue that Washington does not do so well. But rather than sitting idly by and waiting for Washington to get its act together, I have already begun taking action back home in Illinois' 10th Congressional District.

I have worked with community-level programs that have helped give people the tools that they need to be able to lift themselves out of poverty, brought in national leaders to tour our social service organizations across our district, and learned about the unique ways that these organizations are fighting poverty and working for criminal justice reform on the local level.

Recently I had the privilege to introduce Bob Woodson to a few of the inspiring local leaders who are working on these issues. The more time that I spend talking with various community leaders, the more painfully obviously the need to implement reforms to this system becomes.

One of the inspiring local groups working to fix some of the problems in our district is FIST. It stands for Former Inmates Striving Together in Waukegan. FIST works with the community to help individuals that are re-entering society get what they need to reenter the workforce. It is no secret, Mr. Speaker, that most ex-convicts, sadly, end up back in prison after serving jail time. This organization, as well as others, is trying to change that trend by sharing positive stories and offering a judgment-free zone for individuals to get back up on their feet.

Far too often, Mr. Speaker, the success stories that these organizations have do not get told, and, in fact, are kept a secret. Bob Woodson said, "People are motivated to change and improve when they are shown victories that are possible, not injuries to be avoided."

One inspiring young man we had the privilege to meet was Darrell McBride from Waukegan. He took the time to tell us about the journey that he took to get to where he is today, and that story bears repeating. Darrell spent 8

years in prison, which left him with limited resources and educational opportunities. He knew that he needed a job and direction after he was released, or the statistics would suggest that he would find himself back in prison. He turned to YouthBuild Lake County, and since graduating from the program, he has earned a construction certificate and, most importantly, has landed a job.

Mr. Speaker, it is this kind of help that we should be encouraging all to begin to promote within our communities. Thousands like Darrell would benefit greatly from criminal justice reform. While I know that this situation cannot simply be fixed in Washington, I certainly hope that we can help. One way in which I am trying to help is by cosponsoring and working for the passage of the Fair Chance Act introduced by my friend from Maryland, Representative ELIJAH CUMMINGS. This legislation would "ban the box" for Federal agencies, prohibiting them from asking prospective government employees about their criminal justice histories on job applications.

Potential employees should not use criminal history to screen out applicants before they have a chance to look at their qualifications. This policy would enable almost 20 million people to have a second chance and the opportunity to sell themselves to potential employers and make a positive contribution to our country.

Mr. Speaker, we need to deal with what leads people to end up in prison to begin with. We can do this by implementing positive strategies and innovations such as the use of body cameras for police officers to fight crime and to improve transparency and accountability.

Put simply, we need to end the era of mass incarceration, and this means reforming the mandatory minimum sentencing, among other policies.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that going forward we can work with groups to promote the success stories to help to empower individuals trying to turn their lives around and to work with local communities to reduce the rate of incarceration. Unfortunately, there is still a long way to go until this problem is solved, but I would like to thank organizations like FIST and YouthBuild for the great work that they are doing in Illinois' 10th Congressional District.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN AMERICA

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

Mr. PALAZZO. Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my concern over recent events taking place in my home State and around our Nation that tear at the fabric of our country's First Amendment right to freedom of religion.

Time and again we have seen instances in which an individual's right