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House of Representatives

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

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
February 29, 2016.

I hereby appoint the Honorable MAC THORNBERRY to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

PAUL D. RYAN,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 5, 2016, 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.

WE MUST UPDATE OUR WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, every day we are reminded by current events of how essential water and sanitation are to our very existence, whether it is Flint, Michigan, droughts in California, or the challenges of safe drinking water and sanitation for underdeveloped countries. This dominates the news and is at the root of an increasing number of conflicts, which will become only more serious.

Water policy is one of the most critical areas that this Congress ought to be able to address on a bipartisan basis. The facts are stark, opportunities vivid, and public support is strong.

That is why I have spent a great deal of time focusing on issues of water and sanitation since I first came to Congress. Legislation for international water and sanitation is critical not just for humanitarian reasons, but to protect the environment. It helps avoid conflict within societies and between nations because of water scarcity or shared river basins.

I have worked on legislation reforming flood insurance, rewriting the Corps of Engineers' outdated principles and guidelines that should inform their practices on water infrastructure and environmental management, and I have worked for a decade on the creation of a water trust fund. Unlike surface transportation, which has a highway trust fund and a source of revenue, the Federal Government has no similar mechanism for water and sanitation.

The status of our water infrastructure is appalling and getting worse, while support from the Federal Government has been in decline. In fact, there has been a slow, steady retreat on water infrastructure spending since the Carter administration.

The American Society of Civil Engineers has rated our water infrastructure a D. We have almost 170,000 drinking water systems around the country. While the useful life of pipes can be sometimes up to 100 years, we have facilities that date back to the 1800s.

A water main breaks every 2 minutes. The American Water Works Association anticipates the need of a trillion dollars, over the next 25 years, to replace the most critical of more than a million miles of pipe, while congressional appropriations have declined to less than \$1.5 billion a year, a tiny fraction of our needs.

The total mileage of sewer mains in the United States is unknown, but it is

probably between 700,000 and 800,000 miles. Many of these pipes were installed right after World War II and are approaching the end of their useful life. The sewer systems with aging pipes and inadequate capacity mean almost a trillion gallons of untreated sewage each year that is discharged into our waterways.

The total needs over the next 20 years for both sewer and water are almost beyond our comprehension, but the current spending, it is clear, is completely inadequate. The public and the scientists are finding more problems, which will argue for even higher standards.

That is why I have developed bipartisan legislation for the creation of a water trust fund. I have been working on this for years with different bipartisan partners. Given that there appears to be little appetite now in Congress for any tax or fee increase, I have adjusted the bill so that the revenue comes from voluntary participation by companies that have a keen interest in clean drinking water and adequate sanitation—indeed, their very business depends on it.

They would be able, for a tiny fee, to voluntarily identify as being supportive of the water trust fund. A little seal of approval would raise several billion dollars a year. This could be used to deal with the problems of low-income ratepayers that make it hard for overall rates to be increased and to leverage more investment at a time of remarkably low costs of borrowing. We could have significant investment to deal with some of our greatest problems.

This is by no means the entire answer to the looming crisis, but we shouldn't wait for the next Flint or the problems in drought-stricken California or some other municipal breakdown. We should start now.

I urge people to cosponsor my bipartisan water trust fund legislation, H.R. 4468. Let's get started.

This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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