

that Maduro's undemocratic and tyrannical rule is unacceptable.

All options are on the table, and I look forward to continuing to work with this administration and my colleagues here in Congress to stand in solidarity with the democratic opposition and the people of Venezuela.

RAISING THE GAS TAX

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, we begin an unusual week here on Capitol Hill, although unusual is sort of the new usual in Washington, D.C.

The Senate begins deliberations on an 8-year Republican mission to repeal the Affordable Care Act, and they don't fully know what it is exactly they are voting on.

There is uncertainty in the House over both the budget and appropriations, but, you know, there is an opportunity for Congress to take a step back, to do something that will make a huge difference for everybody from coast to coast, something that can bring together a wide coalition of support and meet unmet needs.

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I am talking about addressing the unmet infrastructure needs for a country that is falling apart as we fall behind.

We haven't raised the gas tax in 24 years. And in the course of that 24 years, we have watched the value of the Federal gas tax actually erode 40 percent, due to inflation and increased fuel efficiency, while our needs continue to go up each and every year.

Congress has put together a series of stopgap measures—gimmicks here and there—which have not adequately met those needs, and they have actually increased the budget deficit.

I think back to Ronald Reagan making his Thanksgiving Day speech in November of 1982, when he called on Congress to come back from their recess and more than double the gas tax because, he pointed out, it would put people to work and improve road conditions that were actually damaging people's cars more than what modest increase they would pay. Well, Congress did it, and we were better off as a result. I think each of us would do well to look back at that speech that Ronald Reagan gave, calling on Congress to step up and do its part.

The States are not sitting back. Since over the last 5 years, more than half of the individual States have gone ahead and raised their transportation funding. So far in 2017 alone, California, Indiana, Montana, Oregon, Tennessee, West Virginia, and South Carolina raised the gas tax. In fact, South Carolina raised the gas tax by overruling a Republican Governor's veto.

There are opportunities here for us to be able to step forward and build on

this vast coalition. It really isn't a profile in courage to support legislation that is endorsed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the AFL-CIO, contractors, a variety of labor unions, road builders, engineers, trucking companies, and AAA. The widest coalition of people supporting any major issue before us deals with increasing the fuel tax.

And it is interesting, for those who are worried that maybe there is some political downturn, despite the fact that the States have been able to summon the courage. The American Road and Transportation Builders Association did an extensive survey about who were those intrepid legislators that voted to raise the gas tax since 2012. What they found is that those legislators who had the courage and the vision to do what was right for their States were reelected by an over 90 percent rate.

But this shouldn't be about elections. It should be about what is right for the American people. Stepping up, meeting our obligations, so that the Federal Government is a full partner, working with State and local governments, working with the private sector, to be able to meet the over \$1.1 trillion of critical transportation needs between now and 2025 ought to be the order of business.

I would hope that my friends in Republican leadership would allow us to have just 1 week of hearings on this issue so that we can hear from the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the president of the AFL-CIO, the truckers, AAA, Republican legislators of principle, people across the country who talk about the need to rebuild and renew America, make our communities more livable, our families safer, healthier, and more economically secure.

STUDENT DEBT CRISIS

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

Mr. PAULSEN. Mr. Speaker, we continue to hear about the challenges for college students who borrow more and more to pay higher tuition rates and then are saddled with huge debt loads that they will have great difficulty paying back.

The average debt for a 4-year college student today is nearly \$37,000. We need to explore new ways to ensure that every student has the opportunity to go to school, to develop their skills, and then pursue their dreams without feeling deterred by the price tag.

I think we need to look at a new approach, an approach that would help students pay for college. It is a concept known as an income-share agreement. It is a concept that would provide students the funding that they agree to pay back as small, affordable portions of their income over the years following graduation.

Income-share agreements are interest free, and students only will make those payments if they are employed and if they receive an income that meets a certain threshold. This method of financing puts less pressure on students to keep up with fixed high-interest payments while they are faced with job uncertainty.

Rather than accruing debt under the traditional student loan structure, this makes the investment in these students' future more equity-based. Their payments are guaranteed to be affordable, rather than fixed, and a certain price.

This is a much more manageable plan for students, Mr. Speaker, who are eager to get a career underway after graduation and want to make sure that they are putting their degrees into practice in a field that they have studied and have a passion for, rather than feel constrained by the impending weight of paying back loans right away.

That is why I am co-authoring the Investing in Student Success Act. It is modeled after a program at Purdue University. At Purdue, an average student received a little over \$13,000 in funding for tuition, paired with a student promise to pay back that money in 6 to 10 years after graduation in small percentages of their income.

The bill provides a legal framework for private organizations to invest in individual students through implementing similar income-share agreements. Doing so creates more options for payment and increases accessibility for higher education.

Today, the cost of tuition at a public 4-year university is nearly quadruple what it was back in 1974. Due to rising tuition costs and the increased need for a college degree in the workforce, it is more important now, more than ever before, to address the student loan debt crisis and provide students with the resources they need to graduate with minimal loans.

Income-share agreements also provide the flexibility that students need when faced with an uncertain job market and provide an alternative to the traditional student loan repayment structure.

Mr. Speaker, as we look for ways to make higher education more affordable and more accessible, we should be advancing new innovative solutions to help students go to college without that burden of high debt after graduation, and income-share agreements are another way of accomplishing this.

SNAP CUTS IN HOUSE BUDGET

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

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, just weeks after President Trump released his devastating budget which guts SNAP, our Nation's first line of defense against hunger, House Republicans