

and other companies in the United States, and they want more.

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So what you are looking at is one man who happens to be a right-wing billionaire controlling huge amounts of media all over the entire world, which makes him, in fact, one of the most powerful people in the world.

In the United States, news corporations owned by Mr. Murdoch, 22 television stations, including stations in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Washington, Minnesota, Houston, Orlando and Phoenix. He owns the Fox Broadcasting Network. He owns Fox News. He owns Fox Kids, Fox Sports, the Health Network, the National Geographic. He owns TV Guide. He owns the TV Guide Channel. He owns Fox Sports, radio, the Golf Channel. He also is not content with broadcast media. He happens to own the New York Post. And this is really a small number of what he owns. He owns the Times in London, one of the leading papers in the United Kingdom. He owns the Sun in the United Kingdom, one of the large circulation tabloids there. He owns the News of the World. He owns the TV Guide Magazine in the United States. He owns a conservative magazine called the Weekly Standard.

But that is not all that he owns. He owns Harper Collins, one of our major publishing houses. He owns Regan books. He owns Amistad Books. He owns William Morrow and Company. That means if you want to get a book published, you have got to go through these guys.

Not only that, he has tremendous impact on sports in America. People say, I do not care about books, but I really am interested in sports. Well, he happens to own or at least be part owner of the Los Angeles Dodgers, the Los Angeles Kings, the Los Angeles Lakers, the New York Knickerbockers, the New York Rangers.

Well, I am not interested in sports, but I am interested in music. He owns Festival Records. He owns Mushroom Records, and he owns much, much more.

Now, the point here is it is not just Mr. Murdoch and news corporations. I have talked about Viacom before. It is not just AOL-Time Warner. It is not just Disney. It is not just Clear Channel. It is a handful of corporations that control more than you think they do, and the end result of that is that entire issues of great concern to the American people are not discussed at all because these guys really are not interested in discussing it.

I read recently that Mr. Bush's proposal for \$720 billion in tax breaks is gaining support in America. Well, I can see why: Because there has been relatively little opportunity in the media for those of us who disagree, who think that it is a bad idea that the richest 1/10 of 1 percent get as much in tax breaks as the bottom 89 percent. How many people know that? How many

people know that as a result of that budget, there will likely be cutbacks in Medicaid, Medicare, veterans needs, education, environmental protection? Because if you give away all of that money, you will have less for the needs of working families and the middle class.

How many people know that if you do that huge tax break, you are going to end up with a \$10 trillion national debt that we are leaving to our kids and our grandchildren? Not a whole lot of discussion about that because Mr. Murdoch and the guys who make tens of millions of dollars a year want tax breaks for the rich. They want the American taxpayer to subsidize them, to give them billions of dollars in corporate welfare.

Do you think General Electric, which owns NBC, is going to be talking about all the welfare that General Electric gets through its nuclear power efforts? Maybe, but I do not think so. Do you think that General Electric, which owns NBC, will be talking about all the jobs that GE destroyed in the United States, all the American workers they threw out on the street as they moved to Mexico and China? I do not think so.

So this issue is not some kind of inside-the-Beltway abstract issue. It gets to the heart and the soul and the core of what America is about, and that is if we are to remain a democracy where honest people have honest differences of opinion, we have got to get all of the information. We cannot have a handful of conglomerates who have their own special interests determining what we see, hear and read. And that is why, just to recapitulate what all of my colleagues who have been up here have said, it is enormously important that on June 2 the FCC does not go forward and further deregulate the media so you will end up with even an even smaller number controlling what we see, hear and read.

At the very least, Mr. Powell has got to stop the process. He has got to have public hearings all over America. We need studies to understand what this will mean, what more deregulation will mean to the quality of American democracy, what it will mean to the ability of communities to get local news, what it will mean to small businesses and the ability of small businesses to function within the media area.

This is an enormously important issue. I would hope that anyone who needs more information about this can go to my website at Bernie.House.gov.

I hope that more people will get involved in this extremely important issue. I want to thank all of the Members of Congress who have been here today.

FAST FREE ALTERNATIVES TO SPEEDY TRANSPORTATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CHOCOLA). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. KEN-

NEDY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. KENNEDY of Minnesota. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about the very significant transportation issues that are facing our country.

Why, just today those who have read the Washington Post would read that Virginia backs off plans for two road projects; how the State is abandoning studies to widen Interstate 66 through Arlington and building an outer beltway. This is a road that is heavily used and is limited to two lanes in each direction in highly congested areas, yet they are going to be seeking proposals from companies that might want to build a toll road or other type of highway to serve the same needs, and they are doing this because Virginia is struggling to pay the bills for these roads projects.

That is something that is not just faced in Virginia, but is faced around the country. And right now if they were trying to address these needs, where they are looking for other roads, looking at tolls or other forms of private financing, they cannot do that on interstate roads right now.

In my view, and what I am going to be talking about today, is a proposal that I put forth along with the gentleman from Washington (Mr. SMITH) for fast, free alternatives to speedy transportation. What I am going to be talking about is that we do not want congestion. We do not want congestion that is experienced here in Washington, D.C., or like is experienced all around the country. And we do not want the tolls that we have seen in other areas where you have to slow down and stop at a toll booth, where you have to have the tolls that are collected on that road paying for all types of projects around the area, some of which have nothing to do with transportation. And that is going to be the focus of my remarks.

What is this alternative? This alternative that we are putting forth called FAST I think addresses many of the issues that we are facing today. If you look at it, part of what we are struggling with is the fact that right now we are almost completely reliant on the gas tax as a means of funding our roads, and that has been problematic.

It has been problematic for several reasons: Number one, gas tax does not go up with inflation even though the costs of roads do. We have higher-mileage cars, which are good things. We want higher-mileage cars, but when you have higher-mileage cars that are using less gas for every mile driven, there is less gas tax received for every mile driven on the road.

You also have continued exploration of alternative fuel vehicles, which again is a good thing. Just a few months ago the President from this Chamber put out a challenge for hydrogen-based vehicles. In that challenge he said our children's generations would be driving in hydrogen-based vehicles. But do you know how much gas

they are using in hydrogen-based vehicles? Nada. And how much gas tax will we be receiving from them? Nothing.

So we need to be looking and exploring for alternative ways of funding the important transportation needs that we have. There is also always the reluctance of having our energy costs be higher, so we have to be looking at ways that we can ultimately have supplements to the gas tax.

The funding needs are significant. The gap between what we have available and what we need is just monumental, and it has been a big drag on our economy. In my own State of Minnesota, \$1 billion a year by some estimates is the shortfall of what we need. So this is above and beyond what many or any are really talking about for addressing. We have major road projects like just in our area I-94 from St. Cloud to the metropolitan area which are not on our 10-year road plan for the State of Minnesota. Our major intersection, 35W and 694 in the southern portion of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, that project could take upwards of \$1 billion itself to correct the congestion issues in that interchange, and yet that is not provided for in a 10-year road plan in the State of Minnesota.

So those are just a couple of examples in a couple of metropolitan areas, Washington and Minnesota, Minneapolis-St. Paul area, as examples of the many, many needs across this country that are not being met.

As we think about our competitiveness as a country, we are in a global economy. There is no question about it. Part of the advantage that we have had is we have had very efficient transportation systems. But when we add costs to the system by having this congestion, we certainly are hurting our competitiveness.

We also have, in addition to a shortfall in resources, we have a confidence issue. We have people that are not confident that their road dollars are going to be spent in the way that they would really like them to be spent. We see projects where there is just a phenomenal amount of Federal highway gas tax dollars being spent on just one project.

Right here in the Washington area, the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, over \$1.6 billion in Federal funds alone on one bridge, and when we think about that amount of resources going in the one bridge and how many other projects that that prevents from being funded, we need to look at alternatives.

Boston Big Dig, the Federal contribution to that is \$8.5 billion of an overall \$14.5 billion price tag so far, and it is still climbing. It is because of this that many of the referendums that we have had on gas taxes for increases have failed, whether it be in Missouri in August of last year, or Washington State in November of last year, or closer to home and closer to my opening comments about right here in the Washington metro area that in northern Virginia and Hampton Roads in November of last year failed.

So we need to address not just the shortfall, we need to give people the confidence again. We need to give people belief that the resources that they are devoting and giving to transportation are being spent on the transportation projects that they are asking for. And for the most part, they are looking, yes, for more options, but in many areas they are looking for more concrete, more asphalt, more lanes on our congested interstate highway systems.

If you think about what this is costing economically, traffic congestion costs in the United States more than \$67 billion annually, \$67 billion. That is more than we spend federally on roads and other transportation investments. So this is something that we are not really being smart about this. We are spending \$67 billion annually on congestion, but we are not spending \$67 billion annually here to relieve that congestion.

We also spend more than 3.6 billion hours consumed with delays, 3.6 billion hours. Just think of what you could be doing with that time. Think of how much more time you could be having with your family. Think of how much more time that American workers could be working and being productive rather than just sitting in traffic. Think of how much more time you could do whatever it is you enjoy doing, hunting, fishing, being out on the golf course. America deserves to have that time with their family, that time at work, or that time doing what they enjoy rather than being stuck in traffic.

And importantly to the environment, 6 billion gallons of fuel are wasted in traffic jams every year, 6 billion.

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We have a great concern about being overly reliant on foreign oil, overly reliant on these types of energies that we are importing to keep our country going. Just think of how less reliant we would be if we were not putting 6 billion gallons of fuel into the environment every year just because we are stuck in congestion. Just think of how much better our environment would be if we were not spending that six billion of gasoline on being stuck in traffic.

There are huge issues here. We look at the average cost of congestion for commuters stuck in traffic which is about \$1,160 a year per person. That brings it down to a very significant cost for most families having to pay a lot more just to be stuck in that traffic and now drivers waste on average 62 hours per year per person on traffic. So we can free up a lot of that time, and in my own State of Minnesota we have had amongst the highest increases of congestion of any other metropolitan area in the country.

This is something that is costing us individually dearly in terms of time and money. It is costing our economy very significantly in terms of time away from employment, time away

from other activities and the resources that we are investing; and it is costing our environment as well. So this is something we need to deal with.

We here in America view ourselves as the champions of freedom, the champions of reaching out to market alternatives, to saying how can we embrace our private sector, how can we embrace innovative ideas; and certainly our heritage in that regard has inspired many countries and many peoples around the world to try to emulate us and is very responsible for the expansion of democracy and market-based economies around the world.

Yet in the area of transportation, we are behind. We are not really leaders in that regard. We are still in more of a planned-market type of approach to how we do it. If we look at the case of Italy, they have turned over their national network, the Aus Estrada to a private network, to a private sector. Canada has sold off part of its Ontario Beltway for private people to run.

In China, a country that will be a significant economic competitor for years to come and in growing ways, they are investing significantly in their transportation infrastructure by doing it in a way that embraces public-private partnerships, and this is allowing them to put massive projects on the ground and really help them be even more competitive economically.

Japan is also considering privatizing their national highway network. Australia is doing something very innovative. Every time that there is a major project, the Australian Government requires the public highway organization to have a private entity bid on that and say can we do it better, and those are the types of things that we just have not really considered to the same extent here in this country.

Many States, though, have been innovative in exploring those. Around the country, even though it is prohibited, as I said, with outdated restrictions on Federal roads, it is allowed on State roads. Some States have been very innovative in using these user fees to major transportation problems. Riverside Freeway, for example, in Orange County, California, \$130 million project, four-lane facility in the median of one of the most congested 10 miles in the country, it has proven to be very successful, a private entity coming forward and doing this.

The Pocahontas Parkway, closer here to Washington, Richmond, Virginia, area, \$400 million project used to connect two interstates, Interstate 95, Interstate 295. This is an \$8.8 million four-lane connection that really helped relieve congestion in the Richmond area.

In the Austin-San Antonio area, \$3.2 billion project, controlled access highway, with capacity for managed lanes.

In many of these cases, these are being funded by private entities stepping forward and offering to do these projects. There are many ways where we can embrace these private entities.

The way that I would encourage is to consider having either the public utility commission in the State or the State highway committee offer to set a rate of an acceptable rate of return and to guarantee that rate of return to private entities that will step forward and do highway projects that are in need; and if they were planning on originally paying for it in 15 years and the project was very successful and more drivers chose to use it and it could be paid off in 12 years, to get the rate of return, that is when the fee would fall away.

If it were not quite as successful in terms of usage as they were planning on and it maybe took a couple more years, it would maybe continue to have a fee on it for a little bit longer than 15 years; but in that way, we would not either have excessive, over-the-top returns that are above what should have to be paid for a private entity, and in a similar way, we would not have a project that is a bust, that just is not paying for itself, that would require and have the private entity come back in many cases to try to renegotiate with the State.

So embracing these types of rate-of-return approaches to encourage private entities to step forward would really encourage them to partner with us more as it relates to getting our congestion relieved. Right now we have a lot of these private entities over there in Iraq and Afghanistan building roads, and they would be happy to, I think, embrace this type of a market approach here in Minnesota and around the country.

If we look at what the solution is to this, it is to take this same type of innovation that we have in other States on State roads, the same type of innovation that in ways is being used all across this world, to our own interests. That is what we are searching to do, and this is why the gentleman from Washington (Mr. SMITH) and I introduced the FAST Act, Freeing Alternative to Speedy Transportation; and this is a bipartisan bill. We have Members from both sides of the aisle supporting this bill, and it is a bicameral bill. I was very pleased that Senator WAYNE ALLARD from Colorado has agreed to introduce this in the Senate as well.

It is really a solution-based approach. It repeals the outdated provisions in Federal law that prevent highway expansion with user fees and in many ways is a commonsense approach that unites all those that have been really arguing over other approaches to solve our congestion areas.

What are some of the restrictions, though, that we place? We take away this prohibition, but we do it only assuming that certain requirements are met. Those requirements are few, and they are focused on restoring that consumer confidence.

Fees would only be collected voluntarily so no one is forced to be in these lanes, and they would only be collected using noncash electronic technology.

No one wants more toll booths. When we are looking to get things moving quicker, we do not want to have to slow down and stop to pay a toll, and we do not even want to have to slow down to just run through a booth area for electronic recognition. This is something that there is proven technology out there where it could be as simple as being a tube that goes up in a U-shape over the interstate. It has electronic sensors in it and can tell when a car moves into a charge lane and that car would have an electronic sensor that a person might hang from a rearview mirror or it might be included as part of a person's license or somewhere else that would electronically say, yes, I recognize that person is in this lane, we will deduct that from their account or send a bill for it.

There is also technology for those that do not have the electronic sensor that we would obviously be able to flash a picture of their license plates and send them a bill that way, but this can be done where people can decide to move in and out of a lane at 50 or 60 miles an hour, whatever the posted speed limit is, and do it in a way that we do not have to have massive capital expenditures to delineate one lane from another. This would facilitate the ability to convert this at the period of time when the fees had paid for the road into a lane that no longer had a fee on it.

So that is one key criterion. Voluntary, electronic, no toll booths, no tolls.

Second, is that these fast fees are charged only when drivers use the new lanes, and they are charged only on those new lanes. We are talking about all existing concrete and pavement, would not add new fees to them, but it would only be these existing lanes.

Finally, once that lane was paid for, that fee would expire.

These are the criteria that our FAST Act provides to make sure that those consumers, those travelers, those commuters that are paying for this can have the confidence that their dollars are going to be used well.

If we look at what are some of the benefits of this, there are significant benefits. First, of course, less congestion, less all of those other costs that we talked about earlier that are really grinding down our economy in so many ways, and that is one big thing.

What this does is it gives a new funding source at a time when clearly a new funding source is needed. Also, by being able to empower local areas, it helps these roads get built quicker. A similar type of approach was used with these types of lanes in the Katy Freeway in Houston; and rather than the road getting built in 10 years, it is getting built in 4. So we are addressing the problems now when we have the need.

By doing so, we are doing it in a way that reduced the cost because when we build something today versus 10 years from now, not only do we save the

time-value money, but with the appreciating values of lands along the right of ways with the escalating costs, this is a much cheaper time to be addressing issues that we have today rather than bury our heads in the sand and let them just build into the future with the escalating costs of the buildup of construction along these roads, making the purchase of rights of way and other easements so much more expensive.

This is clearly something that is going to relieve congestion, new sources of funding, get those roads built quickly, and importantly, right now. As I mentioned with the Wilson bridge or the Boston Big Dig, we have major projects that could clearly be funded in this way, partially at least, that are absorbing significant shares of our transportation resources.

By addressing many of the projects where this would be appropriate using fast lanes, we are going to free up dollars for all of the other projects that our cities, that our rural areas have, and have more resources to address their very important needs as well.

I think the other big thing this does is it pushes power out of Washington and empowers the States. Right now with many major road projects, we are the only game in town. A person has to come to Washington to sort of make sure they maybe get an earmark or get a little help pushing this forward. We have got a lot of those requests and continue to put through a lot of those requests and are happy to work in response to those in whatever way we can, but what this does is it puts more tools in the tool box of State and local entities or private firms to step forward and address an unmet need.

I think that is why nationally the American Association of State Highway and Transportation officials have supported this. This is a tool that they should have to address their needs. If a project is not met through the normal approach, the State can step forward using this type of approach, or as in the case of Houston, as I mentioned earlier, Harris County did that project for the Katy Freeway, have the county step forward or private entity come knock on the county or State's door and say, listen, I see a need here; I would like to fill it.

Having more people involved, encouraging innovation across the country, very similar to what we do with welfare, is what we really need to do, unlocking that innovation. More people addressing this very significant issue is what we are trying to achieve with this FAST Act.

I would say also that a key part of what we are doing here as well is restoring that consumer confidence. We are restoring that consumer confidence with the criteria that I talked about earlier, only charge on new lanes, only voluntarily, only electronically, used for those new lanes, and goes away when it is done. That will restore the confidence because we are giving them a true user choice. No one will pay for

this unless they deem that the amount that they are paying they are getting back the return with a value that is worth it.

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And some may say, well, this is only going to be used for the wealthy, but that is proven by studies not to be true. The need to get to your doctor's appointment on time or pick up your child at an after-school program or get to an important interview does not happen only in one income group or one demographic or another. This is used across the section of our society. And in cases where it has been done on State roads, that has proven to be the case.

Also, everybody benefits. Even if you are not using the FAST lanes, there is less people driving in the other lanes. So you are freeing up that congestion, besides the benefits of spending less as an economy on gasoline and putting less gasoline in the air and all the other costs that I spoke of earlier that would be relieved. So this is really a fundamental question of if you are stuck dead in traffic in the middle of the interstate at 10:00 in the morning or 2:00 in the afternoon, or any time of day, should you have a choice of being able to move into an additional lane and move across that lane and along that lane in a much quicker way?

I believe fundamentally that that is a choice that should be there, and this approach ensures that if the market would support a choice being there, then multiple people are empowered to make sure that that option is provided to our passengers, to our commuters.

So this is something that is critically important. And if we look right now, some of the other issues that this really addresses is it really not only embraces the private sector, but it embraces the possibilities for transit. There are many ways of embracing transit with these lanes. One of those might be that you can use congestion pricing. You can vary the level of pricing based on what kind of need there is, and that could either be predescribed as to a time of day, a different fee, or it could be even variable. You could have an electronic sensor that would say what do I need to charge in order to make sure I can maintain a set miles per hour along this lane and make sure that there is a benefit to being in that lane. Those technologies exist, they can be used, and this would be allowed under our bill.

I think the other thing that that would really facilitate is bus rapid transit. Too often folks are saying, well, I do not really want to take the bus because the bus is going in the same congested lanes that I am going in, and there is really not going to be an advantage to that for me. But if you had congestion pricing along these FAST lanes that would ensure a more predictable speed, you could also have more predictable times on a bus rapid transit that would use this. By having

your major interstate corridors having these types of lanes available to them to work with bus rapid transit, you could provide this, as far as transit goes, a very economical transit alternative as well as a very flexible transit alternative.

Transit began with and is still primarily focused on bringing people in and out of the center cities, like an accordion. But the world has changed. Not all the jobs are downtown, and not everybody lives outside of the downtown and the outer areas of the suburbs or the exurbs. A lot of time it is between the areas that surround the center cities where the transit needs are, and a lot of times that might change from one year or one decade to the next. So being locked into a more permanent type of transit might not be the most efficient way.

This embracing of bus rapid transit would be an ideal way for us to help with those transit needs, to help provide alternatives and make sure that we are addressing the transportation needs of our area.

People ask, can you use high-occupancy vehicles? You certainly could, and you could do this in a way where you just only issued electronic sensors to those who are registered car pools or registered van pools. But also there is technology available, required, in fact, in most new cars, which is being phased in over the next several years to require that there be electronic sensors in our cars to be able to tell what the weight of a person is sitting in the passenger seat so that you can adjust the degree to which when an air bag expands, the kind of force that uses so that it is reflective of the weight of the passenger.

These sensors can also tell whether it is an animate or an inanimate object, so you cannot just do the sack of potatoes there. You might be able to get by with putting Rover, or, in our family, Indy, in the car and get away with that, but you cannot get by with just a rock or a sack of potatoes.

If we had that electronic signal that is being sent out to the sensor that was being made available for this purpose, we could also have HOV lanes that could be electronically monitored.

So there are countless opportunities in our modern day of high technology to really embrace transit alternatives and FAST lane alternatives in a similar way, in a very cost-efficient way.

A couple of the other things our bill provides. Our bill provides for the fact that States would not be penalized for embracing these types of approaches. The amount of Federal gas tax dollars that they would have otherwise received would remain the same. The other thing, though, that it encourages is that we look at innovation; that for any highway project over \$50 million, that the State authority looks at whether or not FAST lanes could be used, and it looks at whether or not you could embrace public-private partnerships. As we look at the vast needs

we have and the limited resources we have to meet those needs, those types of approaches, I think, are very severely needed.

So this is something that we certainly need to approach, and it is important for so many other reasons. Last night I had an opportunity to talk about the significant focus we have on creating jobs. Our economy is in tough shape. We have too many people unemployed. A big focus that we have to have, and what those unemployed people want, they want a job, and we need to create them. This unlocking of this alternative innovative way of approaching our transportation needs are not only going to help our economy long term, by having a better transportation infrastructure, it will not only help us be far more competitive on the world stage, but they are also going to create jobs in the making of those highways. The Joint Economic Committee has said that \$1 billion of transportation spending would create 42,000 jobs.

In a hearing we had before the Joint Economic Committee, Bob Poole of the Reason Foundation said that this could bridge the gap between many of the alternatives we are looking at; that it could result in tens of billions of dollars of projects if we did this right and provided other alternative help for our private entities and our public entities that I will talk about in a second. He identified that there was a \$43 billion need in just the top eight metropolitan areas that these types of projects could help finance. Now, \$43 billion is a significant amount of money, but it is also a significant amount of jobs. That could be upwards toward a couple million jobs that this would be creating. That is even more than what the jobs and tax relief bill we passed in this House last week would create.

So this is very important not only in ending our congestion, but in also getting this economy going again and getting people employed. And, again, as we are proposing it, the costs will be next to nothing to the Federal Government, because these projects can be funded, in many cases, by the fees that would be generated, the FAST fees that would be generated on these FAST lanes, and then you would be able to bond them. And by doing that, you are not going to be using revenues from the Federal Government, from the State governments, or the local governments. You may need to have planning dollars to get it going and get it started, but this is something where the fees will be covering the costs in paying for it in a way that does not otherwise strap the resources of any of those bodies.

It is because of the attractiveness of this that so many people back in my own State of Minnesota have supported this. It has really brought together those that are fighting over many other transportation issues, like gas tax, in Minnesota. It has brought together clearly the Minnesota Transportation Alliance, which is supportive of

this. They are looking to have more transportation options, more investment in our transportation, more lanes, more roads, as well as opening up alternatives like bus rapid transit, as I spoke of. But it is also supported by our chamber in Minnesota. They know how important this is to our economy. They know how important it is to our competitiveness. They know how important this is to jobs, and so they are supporting it. It is being supported by the Taxpayers League in Minnesota because they understand that this is a true user choice; that people only pay when, in fact, they are getting a return that is worth it.

I am very pleased that our own Governor, Tim Pawlenty, and his Lieutenant Governor, and Transportation Commissioner Carol Molnaw have also stepped forward and endorsed this. It has gotten great support on a bipartisan basis in Minnesota, just as it is a bipartisan bill here. And I think we need to build on that to make sure that we continue to build that support nationally, which I am expecting will happen.

It is a big concern here, because we are admitting that we do not have all the answers here in Washington; that we want to embrace those local and State and private entities that can help us with this. Admitting that is sometimes difficult, but it is critically and fundamentally important.

One other thing that we need to do, though, to make this whole equation work is that we need to look at how can we help finance these projects. Right now public entities with the ability to issue municipal type bonds that are tax-free have an advantage over private entities. Having private activity bonds and expanding the use of those is something that we need to encourage. So I will soon be introducing a bill that encourages that as well; that picks up on an idea that the prior Senator CHAFEE had to put forward private activity bonds which give these private entities, when they are doing the public work of expanding transportation corridors, the same tax benefit that would otherwise be available only to public entities. In many of these public-private partnerships that I talked about earlier, that is what is being used.

We just came from a hearing where we heard the administration's proposals on SAFETEA, and I am very pleased to see that they included private activity bonds as part of their proposal. I applaud them on that and will look to maybe see if we cannot even expand it beyond what they have done.

I also applaud them for continuing programs like the TIFIA program, the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act, that helps provide financing components that make it easier for public-private entities to step forward and be involved in this. I also applaud them for inching towards the type of loosening up of the outdated restrictions that are currently in

law. And as I spoke with Secretary Mineta and Administrator Peters, I encouraged them and was pleased with their response that they were willing to work to take a couple of further steps along the path of what we are talking about here in FAST to move in that direction.

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I would just conclude by saying that this is not new. Prior to President Eisenhower stepping forward with the bold new program to build an interstate highway system for national security purposes, the idea of using user fees was the predominant idea for how we funded and expanded our core transportation corridors. Since that time, we have gotten our interstate system largely built. I believe for many it was an expectation when that was started half a century ago that we would return to that after the interstate was built. I think we need to.

This is an innovative approach, a new source of transportation resources to help bridge that gulf between what we need and what we have available to invest in our significant transportation needs. It does it in a way that empowers the States, empowers public-private partnerships, empowers local areas, yet assures the confidence of the consumers that they are going to get something that is a return for what they are giving in, that they can be assured that the resources they are devoting to transportation are in fact going to be addressing needs that they see, needs that they want to be addressed.

I would just encourage all my fellow Members to consider joining with us in pushing for the passage of the FAST Act, Freeing Alternatives for Speedy Transportation. Let us end congestion. Let us encourage local control. Let us restore consumer confidence. Let us not have congestion. Let us not have more tolls, but let us let people get to where they want to get to fast, along fast lanes, and get this economy moving again fast.

CONCERNS IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CHOCOLA). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from New York (Mr. OWENS) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, there was a historic leadership summit held yesterday. Today is May 15. Yesterday, on May 14, there was a historic African American leadership conference held here in Washington. I want to salute the sponsors. It turns out that most of the sponsors, practically all the sponsors, are Republican. Every year the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation sponsors a legislative weekend where people in the African American community, certainly leaders from all over the Nation, assemble here in Washington; but they are nonpartisan.

Republicans come, corporate heads, the labor people. It is wide open as a non-partisan event. Everybody discusses common problems.

It is very interesting that this African American leadership conference, which is very new, I suppose I want to say at the outset, is certainly welcome. The attention African Americans are getting from Republicans is welcome. We have no problem with that. The myths that arise as a result of past Republican Party behavior, we would like to see put to rest. There is a myth that Republicans do not care at all for the concerns of the African American community, and, therefore, they are left to the Democrats who take them for granted because they are sensing or knowing that the Republicans do not care to be bored with the concerns of the African American community; the Democrats take us for granted, and they do not exercise themselves too much either over our concerns.

Those myths, neither one probably is true. Republicans are showing that they do care. They recognize simple arithmetic, that even if they got 15 percent of the African American vote, which would be unusual, it would be 15 percent taken away from the Democrats certainly in a national election, and it would go a long way toward guaranteeing victory. If they got 25 percent, of course, they would be unstoppable. So the arithmetic is understood by the Republicans as well as Democrats. If they did not understand it before, they understand it now. Democrats have never ignored taking African Americans for granted. The history of legislation, of positions and actions in the Democratic Party, when you look at them quickly, make it quite clear that they are very much concerned about African American concerns.

Democrats are concerned with things that benefit most Americans. What is good for most Americans is good for African Americans and vice versa. What is good for African Americans is good for all Americans. Attention paid by the Republican majority to African Americans will not only redound to the benefit of African Americans, but I expect it will help a lot of other Americans out there at the same time, because African Americans are on the cutting edge when it comes to suffering, when it comes to being at the bottom of the pile and receiving resources, when it comes to being at the top of the pile when it is time to lay off people and fire people. They are barometers.

We know what is coming with the larger community when we look at what takes place in the African American community. This is something that we have said for a long time. We had problems with diseases. The drug problem when it first arose was primarily in the African American slum communities where it could breed because people had all kinds of problems and the rackets could flourish; but it