

It is for these reasons that the bipartisan leadership of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee propose to restore the purchasing power of the gas tax, which was last increased more than a decade ago. Under the Committee's proposal, the gas tax would increase by a nickel and the average commuter would pay only an additional \$36 per year. The user fee system has served us well. We should further utilize the strengths of that system to generate the necessary revenues to meet the needs of the transportation system.

Regrettably, the reason we are here today with another extension bill is because Administration ideology and political expediency is trumping good policy. The reauthorization bill is again delayed. As we approach the summer construction season, States will be slow to make the necessary investments during these uncertain times. Good-paying jobs will be lost or never created. Last fall, State transportation officials estimated that an extension bill would mean \$2.1 billion in project delays and the loss of more than 90,000 jobs. This extension simply compounds those losses.

Instead, we now face vigorous behind-the-scenes efforts by the Administration and the Republican Leadership to cut the funding levels in our bipartisan bill and develop budget schemes that shift money from one account to another—to increase revenue to the Highway Trust Fund without increasing the user fee. While I will work with all parties to ensure that we find the necessary resources to increase our transportation investment, I will not support smoke-and-mirror proposals that simply further ideological objectives or political expediency, but not the long-term interests of the highway and transit programs.

Faced with these current roadblocks, we must again extend the highway, transit, and transportation safety programs or face a shutdown of both the Department of Transportation agencies and Federal surface transportation funding.

Mr. Speaker, before I close, there is one other very important element of this extension that deserves mention. That element is its continuation of the Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) program, as that program is set forth in TEA 21. Since enactment of the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1982, Congress has included a program to aid socially and economically disadvantaged businesses to successfully compete for transportation construction contracts. Because of this program, we have made impressive strides in increasing the participation of minority- and women-owned businesses in Federally-assisted transportation construction contracts. Today, more than 20,000 DBE's participate in the program. However, as recent evidence demonstrates, there continues to be a compelling need for the DBE program.

The current program is narrowly tailored to allow States to set and refine goals for participation of disadvantaged businesses in Federally-assisted transportation contracts. These goals must be appropriate for the State's population. Further, the current program requires States to try and meet those goals by race-neutral means. It is only when race-neutral means fail to achieve sufficient DBE participation, that race-conscious means may be used.

Indeed, as recent data provided by the States have shown, the lasting effects of discrimination are such that the overwhelming majority of States must continue to use race-

conscious means to try and achieve their participation goals. For example, my home state of Minnesota established a goal for 2002 of 10.3 percent DBE participation in Federally-assisted transportation construction contracts. Minnesota officials determined that only 2.6 percent of this goal could be achieved with race-neutral means and 7.7 percent would need to be met using race-conscious means. Despite its good-faith effort to achieve this self-imposed goal, Minnesota was only able to achieve 6.63 percent DBE participation.

Minnesota's experience demonstrates two important facts about the program. First, as courts throughout the country have found, the DBE program is truly one of setting goals; it is not a quota system. States must make a good-faith effort to achieve its goal. Second, the goal setting required by the DBE program is crucial to increasing participation of DBE's in Federally-assisted transportation contracts. In Minnesota state-funded transportation contracts, where there was no DBE goal established, DBE participation was only 4.42 percent.

By extending this program today, we specifically reaffirm the government's compelling interest in ensuring that States receiving Federal funds for transportation construction make a good faith effort to ensure participation by minority- and women-owned businesses in those construction projects.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 3783.

HONORING SUSAN BOOTH FOR HER
OUTSTANDING COMMITMENT TO
PUBLIC SERVICE

HON. ROSA L. DeLAURO

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 24, 2004

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to join the many gathered to pay tribute to an outstanding member of our community, Susan Booth, as she is honored by the Devon Rotary and named a Paul Harris fellow. The Paul Harris fellow recognition was created in memory of Paul Harris, the founder of Rotary, as a way to show appreciation for contributions to the foundation's charitable and educational program. Every Paul Harris fellow receives a pin, medallion and a certificate when he or she becomes a fellow, identifying the recipient as an advocate of the foundation's goals of world peace and international understanding. The commitment and dedication that Susan has demonstrated is indeed a reflection of all that the Rotary stands for. It is wonderful to see her work so proudly recognized by her community.

Founder of the Archway Foundation, Susan has spent nearly 15 years collecting donations to feed and clothe homeless children in Romania. Inspired by a television program about Romanian orphans abandoned when communism collapsed, Susan, a railroad conductor on a commuter train between Connecticut and New York's Grand Central Station, switched to night shifts so that she could earn a master's degree in social work. Upon completing her degree, Susan went to Bucharest on a week's vacation in search of these Romanian orphans who were living in sewers

and abandoned buildings. With only a short list of contacts, Susan was fortunate to find an individual who knew where to look. "In that sewer, I found my life's work," she has said. Indeed, she has dedicated countless hours to her mission.

Operating out of her own home and a post office box, Susan collects clothing and donations and has been awarded hundreds of thousands in charitable grants. Through her hard work and the generosity of her contributors, Archway has been able to purchase two small homes in Romania as well as employ several Romanians. One of the homes is used as a soup kitchen from which volunteers take food out to hundreds of homeless children every week and provide groceries to squatter families who take refuge in abandoned buildings.

It is not often that you find an individual with such dedication and commitment. Susan's good work has touched the lives of thousands of needy children. More importantly, she has inspired countless numbers of people to donate their time and energy to provide one of life's most precious gifts: hope.

I am proud to stand today to join the Devon Rotary and the many family and friends who have gathered this evening in extending my sincere thanks and heart-felt congratulations to Susan Booth as she is named a Paul Harris fellow. Yours is a legacy that is sure to continue to inspire generations to come.

INDIA DISSOLVES PARLIAMENT:
ELECTIONS COMING; MINORITY
NATIONS SHOULD VOTE FOR
FREEDOM

HON. EDOLPHUS TOWNS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 24, 2004

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, I noticed the other day that India is dissolving its Parliament on February 6. They will be having new elections soon, perhaps as soon as March.

These elections, unlike ours, change faces, but don't seem to change policy. The repression of minorities continues no matter who wins. This repression has killed over 250,000 Sikhs since 1984, over 300,000 Christians in Nagaland since 1947, over 85,000 Kashmiri Muslims since 1988, and tens of thousands of other minorities. More than 52,000 Sikhs, as well as tens of thousands of other minorities, continue to be held as political prisoners. Yet India cites elections like the ones upcoming to show that it is a democracy.

That isn't very democratic for the minorities, is it, Mr. Speaker? As I have said before, the mere fact that they have the right to choose their oppressors doesn't mean they live in a democracy.

Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of the Council of Khalistan, has issued an open letter to the Sikhs in Punjab on the elections urging the Sikhs in Punjab to reject all major parties and vote for candidates inclined to support the freedom of Khalistan, the Sikh homeland that declared its independence on October 7, 1987. That is the only way the Sikhs can survive. The Akali Dal is corrupt, he points out, and the Congress Party organized the June 1984 attack on the Golden Temple, the seat of Sikhism.