

of money could be better spent doing the same project but at another location. Well, that takes a technical change. There is no difference.

I say to all of my good friends, there is no one who is more conservative than I am by all ratings in my last 22 years in both the House and the Senate. There are no new projects. There is no new spending. The amount of money that was authorized is the same amount of money that is authorized at the present time in the technical corrections bill. So it is not somehow getting some kind of an earmark or something else in it.

I have often said that of all of the systems we use in Washington to accomplish things, probably the transportation system is the best. I don't know of anyone who complains about paying into the highway trust fund when they get gasoline. They want to be sure it is going to go to building highways, repairing bridges. But what we do in the State of Oklahoma is we have eight transportation districts, eight transportation commissioners, all geographically located. They make recommendations. What I do with a transportation bill is I leave it up to them to make the determination as to where that goes. The States are making those decisions. The highway trust fund—there are some States where the money doesn't go straight into transportation. They have been robbing balances of the highway trust fund for as long as I know. We have corrected that problem in the State of Oklahoma. Instead of having it go to other causes, it goes to correcting the crisis we are in right now.

I wish to say that for those of us who are conservatives, this is something that works well. If there is any function of government that needs to be addressed and has to be addressed at the Federal level, it is our roads and highways. We have States such as Montana, big States that have very few people. You still have to get across them. You have the congested eastern States that have the opposite situation. That is why way back in the Eisenhower administration they decided to go in together and create this system we still have today. It is one that has worked fairly well. I don't want people out there to think this is something that has a bunch of projects and a bunch of earmarks in it. It doesn't. This is something we spent 2 or 3 years intensively working on prior to its passage in 2005. Now we want to make these corrections to make sure the rest of the projects get done.

Here is the dilemma we have right now. We have a lot of projects—*not* nearly enough but a lot of projects—that we authorized in 2005. If we don't have technical corrections, we are up against the wall now where we can't get anything more done, and we have given our word to people all throughout the country that we are going to improve bridges, we are going to try to save lives, and it has virtually stopped

because we have certain corrections that need to be made.

What we dealt with on that very large, what was it, \$286 billion over the period of 2005 through 2009, which is a lot of money, that doesn't do anything more—it doesn't even maintain what we already have. We don't even have a lot of new stuff in there. There is not a person in America who doesn't know we have a crisis. Some of these Members of this committee or this body, if you don't think it is a crisis, call your wife at home, or your husband, and they will tell you it is a crisis. It is worse every year. It is not something that we can make a decision today and all come to our good senses and get it done and it will be done tomorrow. It is a long lead time. It is a complicated process. But it is one of the things that has worked well.

I know there are a lot of people who want to satisfy some constituency that says you are spending too much money. You tell that constituency to go out and drive in the traffic for a while and see what kind of serious problems we have.

I have often said—and I have followed this myself—we all in this body have different priorities. That is what makes it a representative body. I have often said we need to, No. 1, take care of our Nation's security, have a military that can defend our country; No. 2, take care of the infrastructure we have and move forward with that; and No. 3, which is kind of a pet thing with me, and I think everyone who has previously been a mayor of a major city—unfunded mandates is another area that I feel this governing body should be paying attention to. But we have a bill. We have a bill that is working now. We are improving highways. We are adding lanes. But we have come to a stop. I think anyone who tries to keep this from becoming a reality doesn't want to address a serious problem we are faced with.

No one else is going to do it for us. The States can't do it. It has to be done by the Federal Government. We passed a bill. We are going to be coming up against another bill next year when this runs out in 2009. We are going to be reauthorizing for the next 5 years or 7 years or maybe even longer. But this has to be done and we need to get it done now.

We do have several amendments. I understand the concern of the Senator from South Carolina who has made his statements, and he has done so very eloquently. Frankly, I agree with almost everything he says. The only thing I disagree with is that this bill isn't creating new projects, isn't spending new money. We need, in his State as well as my State and in all 50 States, to get on with this. I hope people realize these are not new projects; it is not an increase in spending. It doesn't spend at all; it is an authorization bill.

Another amendment that is going to be pending is that of my good friend

Senator BOND from Missouri. He has a special concern, and I encourage him to come down to the floor to bring it up, debate it, and let's vote on it and get that done. Then my junior Senator has a concern over something that is a process that happened—it didn't even happen here, but it happened in the other body. Now, I agree with him, it is something that was egregious and needs to be investigated. I think it should be. I think there are a lot of different ways of doing it. I want to join hands with him and get this done.

So we, to my knowledge, only have those three things that are out there that are holding this up. I would invite those three authors to come down. I think while we are not going to be having votes tonight, we can start debating these tonight, and tomorrow morning we could actually vote on some of these. But I agree with the chairman of the committee, Senator BOXER, and the majority and the minority leaders in this body that we need to get it done. We are not going to get it done until we get the amendments down here, debate them, and decide what is the will of this body. That is what we are supposed to be doing for a living around here. That is what happens.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

MR. BROWN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

MR. BROWN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

MR. BROWN. Mr. President, earlier this month, President Bush sent up another trade agreement to the House of Representatives. This agreement is a bilateral trade agreement with Colombia. He calls it a "free trade agreement," a term we use around here—I am not sure why, except that it sounds good, because these trade agreements generally are—I don't have it in front of me, but it was too thick to bind in its original printing. It is about seven or eight hundred pages.

NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement—which the Presiding Officer opposed 15 years ago, as I did—was even longer than that. The way they sell these agreements is they say we are eliminating the tariffs on the trade relationship between—in this case it is Colombia, and Colombia still