

earn the same that her male counterpart did.

Let's think about that for just a second. A woman must work a full year plus an additional 6 months and 28 days just to make what her male coworkers made in 1 year. That is 208 days more than a man must work for the exact same salary.

The average African-American woman working full time year-round will make 64 cents for every dollar that her White male counterpart makes. It is unconscionable that in the 21st century we have not resolved this income disparity.

For millions of African-American women struggling to make ends meet to put food on the table, the wage gap puts the American dream out of reach. To give these women a fair shot—an equal shot—at prosperity, Congress must take action.

We have to ensure that all women, African American and otherwise, are empowered to ensure that they are receiving equal pay for equal work. But that is not all. We should raise the minimum wage.

I could do a quiz in this room, and I think everyone would miss it by quite a long mark, of how many Black women are earning minimum wage, what percentage of Black women are earning minimum wage in this country. Of 100 percent of people earning the minimum wage, what percentage is Black women? Almost 25 percent. Black women are almost 25 percent of everyone drawing the minimum wage. To be exact, it is a little over 23 percent.

An increase in the Federal minimum wage would mean more money for their families. It would be maybe to buy groceries or for an extra pair of shoes for their children—or a pair of shoes for their children—or maybe to help with their education in some way, and importantly, for more time to spend at home.

No woman should make less money than a man doing the same exact work. African-American women deserve better. So do my daughters and my granddaughters. That is why I remain committed to ensuring that American women receive equal pay for equal work.

I encourage all Republicans, especially the leader, to take up Senator MURRAY's Paycheck Fairness Act, which would help close the wage disparity for African-American women.

That may be a tall order to expect from today's Senate Republicans. After all, five times in 5 years, Republicans have blocked equal pay for women. How? By filibustering. Five times in 5 years Republicans have told their very own sisters, daughters, and wives that they are not interested in fixing this income disparity. It is unfair. I can't understand it.

Who here can explain the concept of pay inequality to their daughter or granddaughter without shuddering? How do you tell a little girl—a little

girl with big dreams—that in America today her life's work will not be compensated like a man's. It is not right. It is not fair.

Today, as we recognize Black Women's Equal Pay Day, I hope my Republican colleagues will finally understand that it is unfair to continue the way we are, and we should finally come to our senses. I hope that the Republican leader will make the necessary moves to allow us to address this injustice that hurts millions of American families. Twenty-three percent of people drawing the minimum wage are African-American women. All women deserve equal pay for equal work.

Would the Chair be good enough to tell the Senate what the business of the day is.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

HIRE MORE HEROES ACT OF 2015

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 22, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 22) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to exempt employees with health coverage under TRICARE or the Veterans Administration from being taken into account for purposes of determining the employers to which the employer mandate applies under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Pending:

McConnell modified amendment No. 2266, in the nature of a substitute.

McConnell amendment No. 2421 (to amendment No. 2266), of a perfecting nature.

McConnell (for Inhofe) amendment No. 2533 (to amendment No. 2421), relating to Federal-aid highways and highway safety construction programs.

McConnell amendment No. 2417 (to the language proposed to be stricken by amendment No. 2266), to change the enactment date.

McConnell amendment No. 2418 (to amendment No. 2417), of a perfecting nature.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant Democratic leader.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, the business before the Senate is the construction of highways and bridges and the operation of mass transit and buses across America. How important is that to our economy? I know in my home State it is critically important, but I think it is important across the Nation.

Our infrastructure, our roads, and bridges are critical for business to operate profitably and for people to have good-paying jobs. We all know the tragedies that occur when bridges collapse or are closed, and we know that thousands across this country need repair.

When it comes to mass transit, come on down to the Loop in Chicago in the morning and stand with me and watch the folks streaming out of the train

stations and off the CTA and off the buses, headed to work every day. It is essential to the economy of Chicago and Illinois, the State I represent.

The fact is that on Friday the authorization to build these highways and bridges and maintain mass transit and buses expires. It is the 33rd short-term extension of the highway trust fund—the 33rd. There was a time when we would pass with regularity and predictability a 5- or 6-year highway bill on a bipartisan basis, and we are anxious to do it.

There was a time when Members of the House and Senate knew the needs back home and knew that the Federal Government played a critical role in filling those needs, and so they voted for the highway trust fund reauthorization.

In my State of Illinois, 80 percent of the highway construction is paid for by the Federal Government. When the Federal Government stops paying, folks stop working. You have seen it; haven't you—the potholes, the highways that aren't finished? You wonder why in the heck did they put all those blockades up and slow down the traffic and nobody is working.

The problem has to do with the way we are currently funding our highway program. We are doing it in bits and pieces. My colleague and friend from California, Senator BOXER, draws a pretty interesting analogy. She said that if you were setting out to buy a home and went to the bank, and the bank said that, of course, we will offer you a mortgage, and here is a 60-day mortgage to buy your home, you would say: Wait a minute; I am not going to make an investment such as buying a home if I can only get a loan for 60 days. That is what has happened to the highway trust fund. The expiration of this temporary authorization on Friday is the end of a 60-day mortgage which we have offered to America to build highways.

Well, several Members of the Senate decided to do something unique—not totally unique but unusual, let's say—to try to find a bipartisan compromise that can move this country forward, try to break through some of the rhetoric and debate on the highway trust fund and find something that works.

I wish to especially salute Senator BARBARA BOXER of California for leading this effort on the Democratic side and joining with Senator MITCH MCCONNELL, the Republican majority leader, and Senator INHOFE from Oklahoma, who is the chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee.

This is indeed an odd couple, BARBARA BOXER and MITCH MCCONNELL, but they have come up with a plan—a compromise—to solve a problem.

When I go home to Illinois, what I hear over and over from the people I represent is, Senator, when are you folks in Washington going to stop squabbling? When are you going to stop fighting? Can you basically sit down and reach an agreement to solve a

problem we face? That is what Senator BOXER and Senator MCCONNELL have done, and I have joined in the effort. Here is what they are proposing: Instead of a 60-day extension of the trust fund, it would be a 3-year extension. Six years of authorization but 3 years where the money is on the table. I wish it was longer, but at this point I will jump at that. It has been more than 10 years since we have had a highway bill that long. So it is for 3 years. There is a modest growth each year in spending. I wish it was more. It ultimately is going to give the resources back to the States and localities so they can start building the infrastructure America needs to be successful and to compete.

We have worked long and hard on it. It is controversial. It has divided caucuses. There are 46 Democrats in the Senate and 21 of us voted last night to move forward on this bill. So even within our ranks, there is a difference of opinion. I am glad the Senator from California is here to keep me on my toes. She said 22 Democrats last night voted to move forward. I wish all of them were on board, but some of them have their own legitimate concerns for not being there.

The point I am getting to is that when it came to the necessary vote, we needed 60; we had 62. I have to check with Senator BOXER to make sure I am correct. There were 62 votes to move forward and 22 were Democrats. We stepped up and made the difference to help move this process forward.

So here we are. We are close to the finish line. We are not quite there. Because of the procedures of the Senate, we can't do it as quickly as we would like because we have to follow the rules. The rules tell us we are likely to get this wrapped up perhaps tomorrow—I hope as soon as tomorrow—and then we say thank goodness. With a Friday deadline, we will get something done this week before we go home for the August recess. I would say from the Senate point of view, that is exactly right. It means I can say to not only the mayors back home but also to the Governor, the contractors, the workers: OK. Here are the resources to move forward for 3 years. I can also say we have done what we were sent to do, to solve a problem and to do it on a bipartisan basis.

There is a problem. The problem we have is that Senate action alone is not enough. We need the House of Representatives to take the same action. There was an announcement yesterday from a Congressman from California that the House is not going to take up this measure. They want to go home. They want to start their August recess earlier than any other August recess has been started in 10 years. They want to leave. The Republican majority has decided they don't want to take up this bill; they just want to leave, and that is truly unfortunate.

This is our chance to solve a problem for America on a bipartisan basis. This is our chance to invest in our country

and put people to work building roads and bridges and expanding mass transit, buying the buses we need to serve our communities. This is our chance. Yet what we hear from the Republican side in the House of Representatives is, Sorry, we are going home. We will see you in September.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. DURBIN. I will be happy to yield to my colleague from Rhode Island for a question.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. The Senator from Illinois has just said the House is planning to bug out this week before the Friday deadline when the highway trust fund collapses for the August recess.

May I ask the Senator from Illinois, through the Chair, the following question: Is it even August? Isn't it July 28 today?

Mr. DURBIN. I would like to take judicial notice that according to the Calendar of Business, it is still July; Tuesday, July 28, 2015.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. In the past, have we not worked into the early week or weeks of August before taking the so-called August recess?

Mr. DURBIN. For the past 10 years, the August recess has started in August. The House of Representatives wishes to start it in July.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. And Friday is when the funding for our highways comes to an end. It appears to be the intention of the House to have gotten out of Dodge by then in order to, I guess, dodge any consequence for not having met us on bipartisan terms with a bipartisan 6-year bill.

Mr. DURBIN. Apparently, they need a rest and they want to go home for that purpose, but I wish they would stay and finish this business before they go.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. DURBIN. Of course. I yield to the senior Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, I would observe, after just walking in, that we are talking about the actions that have not been taken formally but that several Members of the House have talked about—we are going to bail out of here.

My feeling is this—and I am asking a question through the Chair if the Senator from Illinois would agree with my observation. One of the reasons I think those statements have been made in the House is because they never believed we were going to be able pass a 6-year highway reauthorization bill in the Senate.

Now, once that realization is there—and I am going to make an appeal to whoever is trying to string out this debate to shorten the time so we can have the vote that is pending right now take place and get on with the last and final vote, so we would actually have that ready while the House is still in session. They could very well take it up at that time.

Now, if the individuals have placed themselves in a corner so that is not going to happen, I don't know. But is it worth a try? That is my question.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, through the Chair, let me respond to my colleague from Oklahoma, to first thank him for his bipartisan leadership on the committee. He and Senator BOXER are an outstanding example of bipartisanship when it comes to this issue. They have produced a 6-year authorization, and though I may not agree with some of the particulars, I thank him for that leadership on his side on a bipartisan basis.

As far as the efforts of the Senator from Oklahoma to speed up the vote in the Senate so we can catch our House colleagues before they leave, I would support it completely, but the Senator from Oklahoma and I both know that any single Senator can divert and stop that effort. I will support the Senator in bringing this forward as quickly as possible.

Mr. INHOFE. I appreciate that. The only other question I have is the second part that I will ask. There is time to do this. I am going to personally make every effort—and I think Senator BOXER shares my anxiety over getting this bill into a position so we can vote.

All we have to do is move this up so we are not going to be voting at the expiring time of 4 o'clock in the morning, when that could just as easily be tonight, and that would give us time to allow the House to look at it and perhaps come up with a better judgment than they have expressed so far.

Mr. DURBIN. I would just say through the Chair to the Senator from Oklahoma, we have to appeal to the better angels of our colleagues' nature, and a cooperative effort would be somewhat miraculous but worth a try. I am happy to support him in that effort.

Let me just close and yield the floor to whoever would like to speak. This is a chance to do what America expects us to do. Why were we sent here? Why did we get elected? I am proud to represent Illinois, but I was sent to solve problems, make life better, and create an economy that is growing.

There is nothing more bipartisan and more important than the infrastructure of this country. If people wonder about that, go visit China and look at what is going on there. There are building cranes in every direction. Highway and train routes are being built in every direction because they are preparing their Chinese economy for the 21st century. Is America? I don't think so. What we are doing is passing short-term extensions of the highway trust fund. We cannot patch our way to prosperity. We cannot, on a short-term basis, have a long-term plan to build America's economy. Because of the hard work on both sides of the aisle, compromises being made, we are at a point where we can have a 3-year highway bill, and it is time for us to do it, no excuses.

I support what the Senator from Oklahoma said: Let's accelerate this in the Senate, if we can, and then pray that our colleagues in the House decide to hang around long enough to take up this bill, which I believe would be a worthy alternative to another short-term extension.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, will the Senator yield for one last question? Mr. DURBIN. I am happy to yield.

Mr. INHOFE. Would the Senator join me in reaching out to try to see if we can get unanimous consent to go ahead and move forward? I know what we are doing is more significant than other things that are going on. If they don't like the bill for some reason, that is one thing, but bring it forward so this can be done. I am inclined to hope we could encourage any of those who are just killing time right now to join us in doing this.

It is my intention to go ahead and make that request, and I will ask if the Senator from Illinois would join me in that effort.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, through the Chair, I would say to my colleague from Oklahoma, let's sit down and put this UC together. Then, the Senator from Oklahoma can take it, as we do by custom, to his cloakroom and I will take it to mine and let's see if we can get this moving forward. I wish to protect the rights of Members, but I think many of them would like to join us in accelerating this process so there is activity on the floor which is productive. I am happy to work with the Senator from Oklahoma.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, let me thank the Senator from Illinois and the Senator from Oklahoma for their efforts on the floor today. I think this continued progress toward a bipartisan 6-year deal to make sure our highways and bridges are funded and repaired is a very important piece of the work.

I wish to join the Senator from Illinois in saluting the efforts of my ranking member, Senator BOXER, who has worked so hard through the Environment and Public Works Committee to get to a place where we now have a Senate bipartisan compromise for a 6-year bill, with 3 years fully funded, and the prospect for all of our State departments of transportation to be able to take on big projects, knowing that funding is out there.

We are taking up this conversation while our own American Society of Civil Engineers gives our American roads the grade of a D. I don't know about the Presiding Officer, but if my kids came home with a D, I would not be amused and pleased about that. So when our own engineers tell us our roads are a D and our Federal highway program has limped along, 2 months, 6 months—these tiny, little steps forward—and now we have a chance to put

a serious slug of money on the table so our departments of transportation can do the work our roads so desperately need, why not go forward with that? Across this country, Americans pay more than \$500 a year in car repairs as a result of our terrible roads—so \$500 out of their pockets getting their wheels realigned or their tires repaired because they have been banged by potholes and bad roads hurting their vehicles. There is a real pocketbook consequence for Americans if we fail to act.

We have a bipartisan compromise. We should push it forward. What the House is doing is not helpful. I hope, as the distinguished Senator from Oklahoma, my chairman on the Environment and Public Works Committee said, they come up with a better judgment than they have expressed so far. I think that under these circumstances, bugging out and starting the August recess before this problem is solved—indeed, before it is even August—is a pretty serious misjudgment.

So let's hope we can keep after this. We do have strong support for getting this done. Whether it is the American Association of General Contractors, whether it is the National Association of Manufacturers, whether it is the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, there are a lot of organizations that customarily support the Republican side that want to get this done. I hope they will be having conversations with Speaker BOEHNER and with Majority Leader MCCARTHY to ask them to have better judgment about what to do in this circumstance, other than to bug out for an August recess before it is even August and leave Americans high and dry without a bipartisan 6-year bill that is being fashioned in the Senate right now.

Again, I wish to express my appreciation to my Ranking Member BARBARA BOXER, who has worked so hard to bring us to this point and our chairman, Senator INHOFE.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Madam President, I rise to speak in favor of the DRIVE Act. I was a supporter of this bill from the first vote we had in the last week. There were some changes made immediately that I thought were important. I think this long-term bill is incredibly important to our country's future. Time and again, we have had these short-term extensions, and that is what the House of Representatives is talking about again.

We have an opportunity here. Americans, as we know, can't fix a road in 2 months. In a State such as Minnesota, where we have two seasons, one road construction season and one winter, citizens cannot plan ahead and our State cannot plan ahead when we continue to have these short-term extensions. They also want to do bigger things and better things for transportation in our State, and this funding

and this bill will allow them to do that, instead of this Mickey Mouse short-term extension time after time after time.

As we have heard from my colleagues, ranking member Senator BOXER, our chairman, Senator INHOFE, Senator DURBIN, and Senator WHITEHOUSE today, I think it is incredibly important that we move forward with this bill.

This Senator came to this issue in a very tragic way; that is, when a bridge fell down in the middle of a summer day. The anniversary of this bridge collapse is coming up in just a few days. It was a beautiful summer day, rush hour, and there were tons of traffic going over one of the most heavily traveled bridges in our State. This wasn't just a bridge; this was an eight-lane highway. It was something you wouldn't even notice as a bridge because there were so many cars on it. It was the I-35W bridge.

On that day, I was in Washington. I remember trying to call some people in Minnesota. The cell phone services wouldn't work, and I was wondering what was wrong with the cell phone service. What I found about 5 minutes later is that people were calling, panicked about their loved ones because tens of thousands of people were traveling near that bridge that day. In fact, when that bridge collapsed, tragically, 13 people died and dozens of cars were submerged.

Heroes who came to the front that day didn't run away from that bridge. They ran toward it. No one will forget the off-duty firefighter Shanna Hanson, who was going in and out, in and out on a rope tethered to the side of the bridge, trying to get people, trying to find people in the murky water. The fact that 13 people died—tragic as it was—was something of a miracle, given how many people were injured. Over 100 people were injured in the collapse.

A schoolbus sat precariously on the edge of the bridge. A Tasty truckdriver literally veered out so the schoolbus wouldn't go over the edge and ended up tragically dying himself when the truck caught on fire. The schoolbus was labeled the "miracle bus" because youth workers on the bus had the presence of mind to take these little kids who were on the bus going out for a summer outing and get them out the back and to safety. That happened. All of that happened on August 1.

As I said that day, a bridge just shouldn't fall down in the middle of America—not an eight-lane highway, not a bridge which is literally 8 blocks from my house and which I drive on every day with my family, with my daughter. That is the bridge that fell down.

So what did we do in Minnesota? In 13 months, we rebuilt that bridge. On a bipartisan basis, just like you see with this bill with the DRIVE Act, we worked together across the aisle. We got the Federal funding, and we rebuilt that bridge, but that is not where the story ends.

Because of what happened, because of the design defect that caused that bridge to fall, in addition to two other issues NHTSA found, which are that there weren't adequate inspections and they also found there were problems with construction guides because there was construction work going on—but the bottom cause was a design defect.

If we had adequate highway funding, adequate inspections, and we were able to go back in and look at bridges, as we did after the fact in Minnesota, and found that others had the same defect and that they had to be replaced—our State put more money into infrastructure, which helped us—I should add for my colleagues in this Chamber that it was one of the major reasons CNBC rated Minnesota as one of the best States to do business in the country, the best State to do business in, followed by Texas, Georgia, and Colorado. Two of the major factors they looked at were the quality of life and infrastructure.

After this collapse occurred, we invested, and that is what this bill is about. It is about making a safer America. As Senator WHITEHOUSE just outlined, our country is getting D's for infrastructure. It is about a safer America. It is about reducing congestion, but it is also about our economy, as shown by what has happened in Minnesota since the bridge collapse. It is about building our economy. When we are building our economy based on exports, we have to have a way to get goods to market. The way you do that is to upgrade railways and upgrade locks and dams, as we did in an earlier bill last year when we updated highways and we updated bridges.

I am very excited about this bill. I love the fact that this leads us to a 21st century transportation system. I love the fact that we were able to get my distracted driving provisions in there, with the help of Senator THUNE, Senator NELSON, and I had worked on them with Senator HOEVEN.

Distracted driving is a major safety risk in this country that we are finally going to be able to find a way to get the money out to the States so it is not just sitting and piling up and going nowhere, so States can start educating people about distracted driving.

There is the work in the bill on graduated driving that I worked on so hard, on licenses as well as drunk driving. There are a lot of good measures in this bill.

Mostly this bill is about the long term. It is about looking at the long-term economy and looking at the long-term safety issues, instead of just putting on a bandaid every 2 months, every 3 months, every 6 months. This is an opportunity that can't be missed.

I ask my colleagues for their strong support. We have strong support for this as well as the Ex-Im Bank. I ask my colleagues across the way in the House to support this bill, do the right thing, and come up with a long-term solution.

Mr. INHOFE. Will the Senator yield for a question from the chairman?

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Yes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. I ask the Senator, How many people were killed in that bridge collapse?

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. There were 13 people killed that day.

Mr. INHOFE. Is the Senator aware that around the same time that happened, in my State of Oklahoma, we were in the process of the last long-term bill in 2005. A mother with three children was driving below a bridge in Oklahoma City. Some concrete dropped off and killed the mother. We corrected that in the 2005 bill.

But the question I would ask you is, Why do we wait until people die before this happens? I have a list of bridges that are in need of attention, and later today I will read it for the third time. We can avoid things such as this from happening, but if we don't do something, if we are not going to do it, then large projects cannot be done with short-term extensions. My question is, Why do we wait until death is at our door?

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. I appreciate that question from the Senator from Oklahoma. I thank the chairman for his work on this bill, for his chairmanship on the committee, and his willingness to work across the aisle on this bill.

I would say this is a major problem. If we do just a short-term extension, then maybe a project gets funded here and there, but we don't do the long-term maintenance, which is never as glamorous as building new projects.

This is about long-term maintenance and work that needs to be done on our existing roads and bridges as well as exciting new opportunities. But when we don't have that kind of clear funding source for our States to see that we have a window, as the Presiding Officer knows with her leadership in the State of Nebraska, you just can't do projects in a State when the funding is not going to be there 3 months later. One is not able to invest in the maintenance and long-term work that needs to be done, and that is why this Senator thanks the chairman and the ranking member, Senator BOXER, for her incredible work on this bill as well because this is about long-term funding for planning, for safety, and also for our economy.

Mrs. BOXER. Will the Senator yield for another question?

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Yes.

Mrs. BOXER. I thank my friend because she has been such a leader. I was listening to every word she said, as well as Senator INHOFE talking about the mother who was killed because of a bridge collapse. This touches our hearts as family members. Yes, as Senators, but as family members we know those families will never be the same—the family, the children of that mother, the families of those who are grieving the loss of their relatives.

I ask my friend, who was so early on a supporter, is she aware that seven States have either canceled projects or completely shut down their highway and transit spending? Is she aware of that?

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Yes, I am.

Mrs. BOXER. I wanted to say that I have a chart here that shows the States that have either canceled or delayed highway projects. These projects are valued at over \$1.6 billion. Think about the jobs and the businesses that are suffering. They are in Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Montana, Tennessee, Utah, and Wyoming.

I have a further question. I know my friend has heard me say this. Is my friend aware that the Associated General Contractors of America came out with a new study? They were just in the New York Times stating that because of our, I will use the word "dithering"—because we haven't come up with the long-term bill, which we are now attempting to do—25 States have lost construction jobs just in the last month. Is my friend aware of this study?

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Yes, I have heard of that study, and I think it mimics what we have seen in other studies. If we don't plan ahead, people will start cutting off the work.

Mrs. BOXER. I will just say before I yield that the States that lost construction jobs last month, according to the general contractors, are Alaska, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. I wanted to read those off.

I will talk about that later, but I wish to thank my friend because the point—when she talked about what happened on this bridge, my friend didn't have to read one word of any statement. This was a heartbreaking memory she will always have. We all go through this in our time here, when there are earthquakes, floods, fires, and bridge collapses.

I would ask my friend this last question: Does the Senator think this is important enough that the House should stay an extra week or even a few days to take up our bill, pass it or if they don't like it, amend it, send it back, and let's get this done for the American people.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. I say to Senator BOXER and Senator INHOFE, I think that is why we are here today, to talk about the fact that we have come together across party lines with people from completely different political ideologies to agree that we need a long-term fix to our transportation problem.

As the Senator mentioned the people, I think sometimes people think about transportation as bricks and mortar or something very esoteric, but it is not; it is about the people who use the system. Senator INHOFE talked about the

people who died in the bridge collapse in his State. There is a memorial for the 13 people who died in our State. I would suggest, if you ever come to the Twin Cities, come and look at it because it shows—as Senator INHOFE knows—everyone uses the roads and bridges. These people came from vastly different backgrounds. They were young people. There was a man who died. He and his wife had just decided they wanted to have a baby. Of all things, after he died, she decided to adopt children by herself, and she decided to adopt them from Haiti. Then the tragedy happened in Haiti, and we actually helped her get these children home. These are people who worked all kinds of different jobs. Some were coming home from work, some were students, some were moms busy in their car. Those are the people who died. They were America. America uses our bridges and roads and trains. We have to remember this is about the people who work construction, this is about the people who use the roads and bridges, and this is about our economy moving forward.

Sometimes we get so into facts and figures and what one House does and what the other House does that we forget why we are spending money on our bridges and our roads and what this means for our future economy.

I thank the leaders of this bill for what they have done, their willingness to take a lot of heat for working across the aisle, for making sure that what we are using to pay for this bill are things that make sense for our country and continue to allow us to move forward, and also for making changes to the bill when other Members had problems with it. That is why they are gaining so much momentum, and I am sure our friends over in the House are looking at this bill. They have examined the pay-fors—they have now had weeks to do that—and they have also looked at the safety provisions and other things in the bill.

So at some point they are going to have the ability to decide if they are for this bill or against it or, as Senator BOXER mentioned, if they want to make some changes. But the key is that we have a good base bill which has brought people together from across the country, from different ideologies, which they can use and look at. If they just want to do another one of these short-term fixes—it is never going to get us where we need to be so we don't have another one of these bridges collapse on August 1, in the middle of a summer day. That happened in this country in this century. It will happen again if we keep this up.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, before the Senator leaves the floor, I would like to thank her again. What I want to say to her is something she has said to me over and over; that is, the importance of finding common ground

when we can. We all know we cannot give up our principles, but we have to search for common ground.

And everyone knows—and Senator INHOFE and I kind of joke about it—we could not be different in terms of our ideology. We really could not. But on this one, on this piece, the need to have a strong infrastructure, we are as one, as progressives, as conservatives.

Frankly, I think everyone in the Senate and in the House should come together around the principle that you cannot have a strong economy if you cannot move goods. That is why my friend Senator INHOFE put together a great new freight title in our bill this time, part of the formula. It is hugely important. If we cannot move goods, if we cannot move people, we are going to fall behind.

Clearly, when bridges collapse, there is devastation. I have shown this particular bridge collapse, along with the one on which Senator KLOBUCHAR was so eloquent. This is a bridge in my great State. We have 40 million people. We take in about 40 to 50 percent of all the imports into our Nation; they go into trucks and trains and planes. They use our roads, and they go across the country to deliver goods to everyone.

Well, the bridge that collapsed in California a few days ago—maybe a week or two ago now—was deemed to be obsolete because it was built for very light traffic. It is the bridge between California and Arizona. There was very little traffic at the time it was built. Now we have a huge amount of traffic. This bridge collapsed. Thank the Lord no one died, so I can stand up here and say that.

This, to me, is the poster child of the work we are doing together. This is the poster child. There is a list of bridges—there are more than 60,000 deficient bridges in America. This is America. They are deficient—some worse than others, but they are deficient.

I have listed just a few here—just a few: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin. This is just a handful—a couple of handfuls of the 60,000-plus bridges that are deficient.

Senator INHOFE, in your State we have listed as an example the I-40 bridge over Crooked Oak Creek. As I was saying yesterday, when I was a country supervisor a very long time ago, we found out as supervisors—and we were a very bipartisan group—that our civic center was at risk of collapse in an earthquake. In those years, we did not know that much about how to reinforce. It was just coming to light. It is a Frank Lloyd Wright building, a gorgeous building, a historic building.

We were told that if we did not fix it, there was a possibility that we could be held personally liable if something happened.

Clearly, no one here is going to be personally held liable if a bridge collapses, but morally we need to understand that now that we know we have 60,000-plus bridges in bad condition and that 50 percent of our roads are not up to par, we have an obligation to fix it. It is very clear that we must do so.

I am proud that almost half of the Democratic caucus has come together with a larger percentage of the Republican caucus to put together a transportation bill. I am proud of that. It is on the road to passage. Last night, at a crucial moment late in the evening, we got 62 votes. That was not an easy thing to do because, as the Presiding Officer knows, there were things she wanted in that bill, and there were more things I wanted. I wanted things out of the bill and other things added. Each one of us, of course—we are people who are passionate about these issues. We would have written the bill differently. I would say that anyone in America, having the chance, would write it differently. But the art of compromise is something we should not be afraid of. You are not compromising your principles; you are seeing where you can find a sweet spot. I believe we did that.

I am urging the House not to leave on their summer break and to stay and work on this bill. We have done a lot of the heavy lifting. We have done a lot of the heavy compromising. They can do more. They can take out things they do not like, add things they want. We can sit down in a conference. We can get this done.

My opinion: They should take it and pass it. When a bill has 62 votes here, that is pretty darn good. If they want to tweak it, they can do it. But I think they need to stay.

I served proudly with my friend Senator INHOFE in the House. I served for 10 years. It has been 10 years since the House has had this long of a break. They have not left before August for the August recess. I think they should stay. They should stay.

You know, the average American, when they are about to go on their summer break, the boss says: Clean up your desk, please. Finish your work, please. Don't just pile everything on one side of the table, please. Take care of it.

The House ought to finish its work. Take up our bill, amend it, send it back, and we will get it done. Most of the work is done. Most Americans have to tie up loose ends before they take a long break. I might add, I think it is a 5-week break—a 5-week break. Do your work. Maybe you can only go on a 4-week break. That would still be twice the time most Americans get. Do your work.

When I say bridges are in poor condition, that is not hyperbole, that is fact. This is not some study put out by a

Democrat or a Republican; it is put out by the engineers. Our infrastructure is rated—I believe it is a D overall. If our child came home and said “Mom, I have a D,” we would not be happy. Well, taxpayers are not happy that our infrastructure is rated a D.

So I ask the House: Please stay and do your job. Roll up your sleeves. We will work with you. We can resolve these things. You have had time to look at our bill.

I will close with just two more points. I want to give the highlights of our Transportation bill on which we worked so hard across party lines—Senator INHOFE; myself; the Banking Committee, chairman and ranking; the Commerce Committee, chairman and ranking; the Finance Committee, which paid for this bill.

Some people are voting against it because they do not like the way it is paid for. They say it is better to find some long-term answer in international tax reform. Personally, I think that is a great idea, but you have time to pay for the last 3 years in that fashion. We have paid for 3 years; this bill is 6 years. Pay for the last 3 years.

As for me, I am a lonely voice here. There are about five of us who say: A penny a month for 10 months on the gas tax. We don't have the votes. So what do I do? Go in my corner and cry? I don't have the votes. No, we have to put a bill together. So this is a \$50 billion-a-year bill for 6 years. Three years are paid for. Every State gets more formula funding for both highways and transit. There are two new programs: a formula freight program that my friend Senator INHOFE, working with Republicans and Democrats, put together; and a new grant program for major projects called the AMP Program. Senator WHITEHOUSE worked across the aisle for that program. All of our States are eligible.

It includes the McCaskill bill. It is the McCaskill-Schumer bill that says rental car companies cannot lease out cars that are under recall. I think this is important because we see a lot of the problems with the Takata air bags.

Because Senator NELSON has worked so hard on that, we have tripled NHTSA fines. We have used that money in the bill to help put positive train control on the commuter rails. This is important. People are dying because we do not have positive train control.

Is the bill the perfect bill on safety? In my view, it is not. In somebody else's view it is. It is a compromise. But I think, overall, it is solid. Every State will see an increase in their highway dollars, in their transit dollars.

In closing, I wish to thank Senators on both sides of the aisle, including the Presiding Officer because we did work together. We did a good job. It was hard to do. I know my friend had one provision she wanted. She had to scale it back. It is hard to do that. I had a program I wanted. It got scaled back. We all have to give and take, but that

is what the people expect of us. Whether they are Democrats, Republicans, Independents, it does not matter—they want us to get something done.

I am proud of the Senate. We are not done yet. We still need some more votes on this, so everyone stay tuned. But if the House will stay an extra few days and take up our bill, we can get this done for the American people. We can save businesses, we can save jobs, we can keep this recovery going, and we can feel proud that we fixed our bridges, that we fixed our highways, and that we did the work we are supposed to do.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, well, I am going to have to disagree with my partner over here on one thing; that is, the insistence that the House stay. In my opinion, they are not going to stay. That is done. But this can still be done with their targeted adjournment date for them. The way that can happen is for us to right now—we are waiting out the vote. If nobody yields backs—it is on the Inhofe substitute. That is what we are doing right now. That vote can take place at 5 o'clock in the morning. If you moved that up—and right now we are asking unanimous consent to do that. If we are able to do that, that could happen this afternoon. That means we could have the next step, which would be to move to the bill. That could be done while they are still here.

What I do not want to happen is to have them—you know, we are successful and done with our bill and then send it over to the House and they are gone. So I think we can still do it while the House is still here.

I have to say—and I am not sure the ranking member of my committee, Senator BOXER, agrees with this, but I think they never believed we would be able to get the bill done. That being the case, they staked out early and said they—for any number of reasons, they are going to be gone. Well, we can do it. All we have to do is to move this up and to get time yielded back. We can do the same thing then on final passage. We could have the bill over there in good enough time—Wednesday; that is tomorrow—that they could still act on the bill. That would be my goal on this because I think that is the only way.

Mrs. BOXER. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. INHOFE. I will yield.

Mrs. BOXER. I would love to get this done in 5 minutes. So let me be clear about where I stand. But has my friend received confirmation from Speaker BOEHNER that he would take up the bill tomorrow? My understanding is that they moved up their—this is what I heard. I can't swear to it, I don't know exactly, but what I heard is they are actually moving up their adjournment from Thursday to Wednesday so they can escape from having to take up our bill.

Does my friend believe that if we could get this bill done, they would stay 24 hours and deal with our bill?

Mr. INHOFE. Reclaiming my time, I don't know what they would do, how long they would stay. If we don't finish it until they already are gone, then we know that.

Mrs. BOXER. OK.

Mr. INHOFE. But I still think that can be done. There is this urgency. We have worked long and hard. People say they haven't had time to get into this thing. We passed our bill. They have had 5 or 6 weeks to absorb this. And this argument that we have a 6-year bill with only 3 years of funding—this is kind of a phony argument because we have a valve that doesn't exist anywhere else that if we go through and start a 6-year bill, that would allow us to get into the major projects which the Senator from Minnesota was talking about and which the Senator and I have been talking about that you cannot get into with short-term extensions.

Mrs. BOXER. That is right.

(Mr. CRUZ assumed the Chair.)

Mr. INHOFE. We all understand that. So we can start those projects. Given 3 years, I can assure you that we would have the opportunity to find offsets that would be acceptable. We were operating under the gun before. This would take that away. We can go ahead and accept the fact that we have 3 years funded.

For those individuals—and I am speaking now of my colleagues on this side of the aisle—who are conservative who have had the argument that we will then have to borrow money in order to finish the 6 years.

We can really have it both ways. We start the projects, and then there will be enough pressure on and we will be able to do—incidentally, I have to keep reminding my friends that there is a conservative position, and that is to pass this bill.

You know, I get so tired of people—there are a lot of people out there who actually voted for the \$800 billion—way back at the beginning of the Obama administration—the \$800 billion stimulus bill that didn't stimulate. We tried to put an amendment on there. I know the Senator from California and I co-sponsored amendments. They were all rejected.

Then along came the \$700 billion bailout, and a lot of my Republican friends voted for that.

Now they complain that the money isn't there. Well, the money can be there. And if it hadn't been for those two things, we wouldn't be having this conversation today. But the money can be there. We need time to let that happen. Certainly, as we pass this bill, start the major projects that are going on, then we will be in a position to do that. The key to making that happen, to allowing that to happen—I am not going to give up because the House

hasn't left yet. They say they are going to leave tomorrow afternoon. Well, if we go ahead and yield back enough time to get this vote this afternoon, we could do the same thing on the final vote.

By the way, those individuals who want to have amendments, you can still have germane amendments that would not be treated as an amendment, but we would consider putting those into the managers' amendment. If that happens, that would become part of the vote we would be voting on tomorrow. To allow that to happen, we have to go ahead and yield back time so that we can have this vote take place and start working on those amendments that are germane to see which of those we are going to be in a position to consider.

Anyway, that is what I am hoping will happen. I think there is an opportunity.

Again, people who make statements—and I have a lot of friends in the House. I spent 8 years in the House. These individuals who are speaking now—one of them made kind of an off-the-cuff statement about, you know, we are just not going to consider it. Well, I really believe most of them over there felt we weren't going to be successful in passing a bill. So it is still possible we can do that. We do have the time left, and we know what we have to do to do that.

Let me talk a little bit about the sense of urgency.

First, I appreciate the fact that this conversation took place. The Senator from Minnesota had some pretty graphic pictures of what happened that took the lives of 13 people, a bridge falling down.

The DRIVE Act contains some other key provisions outside of prioritizing bridge safety and stability.

Today, the National Highway System carries more than 55 percent of the Nation's highway traffic and 97 percent of the truck freight traffic.

We have never had a freight provision. This is my sixth bill that I have worked on—actually going all the way back to the House days—and we have never had a freight provision to take care of this problem.

Of the 4 million miles of public road, the National Highway System represents 5.5 percent of the Nation's most heavily traveled miles of road. Americans depend upon a well-maintained National Highway System that provides critical connections between urban and rural communities. American businesses pay an estimated \$27 billion a year in extra freight transportation costs due to the poor condition of public roads.

Look at it. Look at that. How many lanes are there on this one? There are six lanes, all of them stopped. What happens when they stop? The engines keep going. The air is polluted. Gasoline costs a lot of money, and the freight cannot go through. Well, that is why we have this.

Recognizing that it is the foundation of the Nation's economy and the key to

the Nation's ability to compete in the global economy, it is essential that we focus efforts to improve freight movement on the National Highway System. Incidentally, if we don't pass this bill and if we go back to extensions, that ain't going to happen. It can't happen.

I always have to pause to remind my conservative friends—and I can say this because I have had the ranking of the most conservative Member probably more than anybody else has—the Constitution tells us what we are supposed to be doing. We are doing a lot of things the Constitution never contemplated. It says in article I, section 8 that we in the House and the Senate are supposed to be defending America and roads and bridges. That is what we are supposed to be doing. So I would just say I have to remind people that the conservative position in the Constitution is to go ahead and do what we are trying to do with the DRIVE Act today.

The DRIVE Act includes two new programs to help the States deliver projects that promote the safe movement of consumer goods and products.

The first new program is the National Freight Program. That is what we are talking about right now.

That is what is bogged down in traffic right here.

It is distributed by a formula that will provide funds to all States to enhance the movement of goods, reduce costs, and improve the performances of businesses. The program would expand flexibility for both rural and urban areas.

A lot of the reason this hasn't been handled before is that States send in their priorities. You know, one of the few things in government that do work is what we are going through right now. When we set up a formula, we take into consideration what the people at home want, what the people in my State of Oklahoma think is the most important thing in terms of roads, bridges, highways, and maintenance. There are some liberals here in Washington who think there has never been a good decision unless it came out of Washington. But we always emphasize what they consider to be the greatest concern within their States.

The reason that freight doesn't often get the high priority it should is because a lot of the freight moves in and out of a State and the States don't evaluate that as an economic benefit. That is shortsighted because States on either side provide that kind of traffic, and it does add to the economy of the State, it is just not direct the way the rest of the projects are.

So we have this type of congestion taking place.

Secondly, it will improve efforts to identify projects with a high return on investment through State freight plans and State advisory committees.

The second new program is the Assistance for Major Projects Program, which creates a competitive grant program to provide funds for major

projects of high importance to a community, a region, or to the Nation. The program includes a set-aside for rural areas and it ensures an equitable geographic distribution of the funds. The State of Oklahoma is a rural State, so that is very important.

One thing you cannot do with the short-term extensions—keep in mind, the last time we had a long-term bill, the reauthorization bill, was 2005. By the time 2009 got here, we were working on just the short-term extensions—33 short-term extensions. So you can't do those major projects that have to be done sooner or later in our country.

In Chicago, IL, the I-290 and the I-90/I-94 intersection is the intersection we have been looking at with the congestion. It is the No. 1 worst freight bottleneck in the United States. The average speed slows down to 29 miles an hour. Morning and evening rush hour speeds have been known to drop below 20 miles an hour. It carries about 300,000 vehicles a day. That is the Chicago I-290.

Houston, TX, the I-45 at U.S. 59—and certainly the occupier of the chair is fully aware of this and I am sure has been bogged down in traffic many times on the Texas I-45 at U.S. 59 exchange. Houston, TX, is the home of 5 of the top 20 freight bottlenecks in the Nation. Texas is home to 9 of the top 25 freight bottlenecks. Freight bottlenecks cost the freight industry in Texas \$671 million annually and 8.8 million hours of delay.

This is what we are looking at, looking at Houston. It happens that I was stopped there going there one time. That is why I always fly down to South Texas rather than drive—to avoid that.

So I-45 at the intersection is ranked third in the Nation by the congestion index. It is the same I-45 at 610 North that is ranked 15. There is an average speed slowdown to 39 miles per hour, and there they are, out there wasting valuable time.

Fort Lee, NJ. The I-95 you are looking at right now connects Fort Lee, NJ, to New York City. It is the second worst freight bottleneck by congestion index in the Nation. The average speed slows to 29 miles an hour. Rush hour speeds in the morning and evening slow down to about 15 miles an hour.

The nearby I-95 Cross-Bronx Expressway is the most congested corridor in the country. By the way, anyone from here in Washington who is going up to anyplace along the coast, Connecticut on up North, has to go through that, and I have had to do that. I had an occasion just the other day to give a commencement talk up at the Coast Guard Academy. To get up there, I had to go all the way across that bridge, and it almost made me late. So that is one that is well known.

The George Washington Bridge is the world's busiest motor vehicle bridge, carrying over 106 million cars a year.

Anyway, that is what we have right now. We have a freight program to alleviate this type of congestion and increase America's ability to conduct commerce on our highways.

We have another talk that we have given several times where we go over all of the bridges. The Senator from Minnesota was talking about the tragedy of the bridges. But if you look and you see, it is not just confined to the east coast. If you look and you see, in my State of Oklahoma, in the northeastern section, we have more deficient bridges—probably ranked No. 3 in the Nation, I would say—and those bridges are not going to be addressed until we have a chance to do it.

Simply look at this Eisenhower quote, a republican president who understood the need for federal investment in our military and our highways. I always like this because I chair the Environment and Public Works Committee and have been ranking member of the Senate Armed Forces committee. I think it is deplorable, what President Obama has done to our military. I call it the disarming of America.

Yet the guy who started this whole thing—I don't think even the Chair is aware of the fact that the reason Eisenhower started this way back in 1956 was to defend our Nation. He said: As it is right now, we don't have any type of a system where you can take goods and services and move them across either coast to be sent out in the defense of this country.

So I am hoping that we all realize the need to reauthorize this long-term bill. Right now, we are in the middle of not doing anything, not getting done, but it is a 30-hour delay. If we can just move that up so that instead of voting on that at 5 o'clock in the morning, we can vote on it this afternoon—which would be just as easy to do, and I am going to ask unanimous consent that we be able to do that—then we could move on and do the same thing as we move toward the bill.

Now, if that happens, for those individuals—and I would hope the staff is listening to this—who have germane amendments, we can't take up amendments after passage. This is going to pass. We know this is going to pass, but is it going to pass this afternoon or is it going to pass tomorrow morning? If so, we then would not be in a position to do anything if the House has already adjourned.

If this happens, if Members will bring amendments down, we will consider germane amendments. We still have the managers' amendment we will be able to put these in, and so we will consider these. So there is an opportunity for that to take place, and I wouldn't want anyone voting to deny this opportunity to finish this bill and let the House at least look at it, thinking they will not be able to get their amendments in.

We haven't had an opportunity to get amendments in for a long time. I al-

ways hasten to say this because how long has it been now. It has been 6 weeks since we passed this out of our committee and it passed unanimously—every Democrat and every Republican. I have to say the Republicans on the committee I chair are among the most conservative Republicans and the Democrats are among the most liberal Democrats. That is a holdover from when the Democrats had control of the Senate, and the Environment and Public Works Committee was chaired by my colleague, who refers to herself as a very proud progressive, which means liberal, and I am a very proud conservative. So we all have this in common.

Just to have this opportunity to have this up so we can consider it, we would have to move this up and get this vote today instead of tonight. So I am hoping that will still be the case. We are making our case on that. Again, that would allow us to get this done in a way—or at least to let the House look at this and see whether it is an option they may want to pursue. I know several have painted themselves into a corner, but nonetheless we could do this if we can hurry this up.

I know there are other speakers on the floor, so I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I want to compliment the Senator from Oklahoma for his great work on this legislation. He has been a fierce advocate for transportation funding, for doing highway bills on more than a short-term basis. As he has mentioned numerous times, since 2009 we have had 33 short-term extensions—patches, if you will—which make it very difficult to run a highway program.

The Senator from Oklahoma has been, as I said, a fierce and persistent advocate that one of the responsibilities we have around here is to make sure we are building the infrastructure in this country that keeps our economy competitive, that allows people and freight to move in an efficient way and to ensure our economy is strong and vibrant.

I can tell you, as someone who represents a rural State in the middle of the country, the supply chain we have between our highways and bridges, our railroads, our ports, is critically important for us to get our products, the things we raise and grow in South Dakota, to the marketplace. Agriculture is our No. 1 industry. It drives our economy. It is incredibly dependent upon transportation. So a strong, vibrant, robust economy depends upon transportation.

Obviously, we want to have a system that is safe, and that is one of the issues I want to speak to with regard to this bill as well. I appreciate the great work Senator INHOFE and his team, working with Senator BOXER, have done on this bill.

We are going to continue to debate this. I hope we can bring it to a close.

As the Senator from Oklahoma pointed out, if we did that, we would have an opportunity to at least put it before the House and give them a chance to act on it, whether they choose to or not. I would certainly hope the House of Representatives would take a hard look at this bill and consider taking it up and moving it because there has been a lot of work that has gone into it. We have a deadline ahead of us, and if we don't do this, we are going to be stuck with yet another—the 34th—short-term extension, which just kicks the can down the road and makes it more difficult for those who are in the position of having to make decisions about planning and designing our infrastructure in this country to do that.

Obviously, there are a lot of people and a lot of jobs that depend upon the decisions that come out of Washington with regard to this bill. So I, too, encourage our colleagues in the Senate to move as quickly as we can to complete action on the Senate bill and to allow the House of Representatives to take a chance at considering it and perhaps getting this issue resolved and a long-term bill in place.

These bills are nothing new in the Senate. The bill before us today is notable because it is the first Transportation bill, as I mentioned, in almost a decade to provide more than 2 years of funding for our Nation's infrastructure needs. Since 2009, Congress has passed more than 33 short-term funding extensions. That is an average of approximately five funding extensions a year. That is not a good way to manage our Nation's infrastructure and it wastes an incredible amount of money.

Around the country, hundreds of thousands of people and hundreds of thousands of jobs depend on funding contained in transportation bills. When Congress fails to provide the necessary certainty about the way transportation funding is going to be allocated, States and local governments are left without the certainty they need to authorize projects to make long-term plans for transportation infrastructure. That means essential construction projects get deferred, necessary repairs may not get made, and the jobs that depend on transportation are put in jeopardy.

My home State of South Dakota has been forced to defer important construction projects thanks to the lack of funding certainty. No individual or business would start building a house or an office building if it could only promise a contractor 3 months of funding. In the same way, Congress can't expect a State to begin construction of a new bridge or highway without the certainty that their project is going to be fully funded.

The highway bill before us—the DRIVE Act—reauthorizes transportation programs for 6 years and provides 3 years of guaranteed funding. All 3 years of funding have been paid for without raising the gas tax and without adding a dime to the deficit. This bill will give States and local governments the certainty they need to plan

for and commit to key infrastructure projects.

The bill will also help to strengthen our Nation's transportation system by increasing transparency in the allocation of transportation dollars, streamlining the permitting and environmental review processes and cutting redtape.

Mr. President, over the past few years of Democratic control, the public has grown increasingly skeptical of Congress being able to function. When Republicans took the majority in January, we promised the American people we would get the Senate working again, and we have been delivering on that promise.

This Transportation bill is another major legislative achievement and the result of hard work by several committees that put together key provisions to spur important infrastructure investment and safety improvements. Republicans and Democrats alike got to make their voices heard in this process, and the resulting bill is stronger because of it.

As chairman of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, I had the opportunity to work on the commerce section of the bill. Our focus was on enhancing the safety of our Nation's cars, trucks, and railroads, and the bill we produced makes key reforms that will enhance transport safety around the country.

Over the past year, the commerce committee has spent a lot of time focused on motor vehicle safety efforts. Last year was a record year for auto problems, with more than 63 million vehicles recalled.

Two of the defects that have spurred recent auto recalls—the faulty General Motors ignition switch and the defective airbag inflators from Takata—are responsible for numerous unnecessary deaths and injuries, at least 8 reported deaths in the case of Takata and more than 100 deaths in the case of General Motors. Indications point to the Takata recalls as being among the largest and most complex set of auto-related recalls in our Nation's history, with more than 30 million cars affected.

Given the seriousness of these recalls, when it came time to draft the highway bill, one of our priorities in the commerce committee was addressing auto safety issues and promoting greater consumer awareness and corporate responsibility. The commerce section of the DRIVE Act now triples the civil penalties the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration can impose on automakers for a series of related safety violations—from a cap of \$35 million to a cap of \$105 million—which should provide a stronger deterrent against auto safety violations such as those that occurred in the case of the faulty ignition switches at General Motors.

Our portion of the bill also improves notification methods to ensure that consumers are made aware of recalls.

In the wake of the recall over the GM ignition switch defect, the inspector general at the Department of Transportation published a scathing report identifying serious lapses of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, or NHTSA, the government agency responsible for overseeing safety in our Nation's cars and trucks.

The concerns raised included questions about the agency's ability to properly identify and investigate safety problems—a concern that is further underscored, I might add, by the circumstances surrounding the Takata recalls.

In addition to targeting violations by automakers, our portion of the highway bill also addresses the lapses at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration identified in the inspector general's report.

In its typical fashion, the Obama administration claimed NHTSA's problems could be solved by simply throwing more money at the agency, but based on the expert testimony from the inspector general, it is clear money alone is not going to solve the problem. We need to ensure that the agency fixes what is broken before we provide a significant increase in funding authorization with taxpayer dollars.

Our bill makes additional funding increases for NHTSA's vehicle safety efforts contingent on that agency's implementation of reforms called for by the inspector general, ensuring that this agency will be in a better position to address vehicle safety problems in the future.

I appreciate that NHTSA's current administration and Administrator have pledged to implement all of these recommendations.

Another big focus of the commerce committee this year has been rail safety. Nearly half of the commerce section of the DRIVE Act is made up of a bipartisan rail safety bill put together by the Republican junior Senator from Mississippi and the Democratic junior Senator from New Jersey. Their work on important rail and Amtrak reform was almost ready for a committee markup at the beginning of May, but after the tragic train derailment in Philadelphia, these two Senators opted to delay the markup and then added even more safety provisions to the bill they crafted.

Their bill, which passed the committee with unanimous support from committee members of both parties, include provisions to strengthen our Nation's rail infrastructure and smooths the way for the implementation of new safety technologies.

Our transportation infrastructure keeps our economy and our Nation going. Our Nation's farmers depend on our rail system to move their crops to the market. Manufacturers rely on our Interstate Highway System to distribute their goods to stores across the United States. All of us—all of us—depend on our Nation's roads and bridges to get around every single day. For too

long, transportation has been the subject of short-term legislation that leaves those responsible for building and for maintaining our Nation's transportation system without the certainty and the predictability they need to keep our roads and highways thriving.

I am proud of the bill we have on the floor before us. I hope we can pass this legislation as soon as possible and work with the House to develop a final bill that will allow us to fund our Nation's transportation priorities on a long-term basis. We can't afford to continue this path we have been on of passing short-term extensions—33 already in the last 5 years, more than 5 a year—and all the uncertainty that comes with that. That jeopardizes jobs across this country that are related to construction of these projects. It jeopardizes the planning and engineering and design work that our departments of transportation across the country do, and it puts at risk all of the transportation infrastructure that moves the freight, that moves people across this country, which our economy depends on.

So I simply want to say that as a Member who represents a rural State, South Dakota—where we have 77,000 square miles, home to 800,000 people—we depend heavily on roads and bridges to get to and from our destinations. We have people who drive long distances to work. We have people who come into our State every single year.

This time of the year we will have a million or so people descend upon a little town in South Dakota called Sturgis, which will be the place where the annual motorcycle rally is hosted. We have people who come by the thousands to our State every single year to visit the Black Hills and Mount Rushmore. We depend upon a good, viable, robust transportation system.

As I mentioned earlier, we are an agricultural economy which drives the jobs in our State that keeps our Main Streets going. That agricultural economy depends upon getting those things we raise and grow to the marketplace. That means good highways, railroads, ports—all the things that are essential to make sure our agricultural producers can get the things they raise and grow to the places and destinations they need to get to.

This is truly important work we are doing. I thank the Senator from Oklahoma for his hard work. I certainly hope we can push this across the finish line soon, so we will be able to present it to the House of Representatives, notwithstanding the statements that have been made there. Perhaps they can look at this body of work and think, as we do, that this gives us an opportunity to put something on the books, the longest term bill we have had literally now in 10 years, and do something important for our economy and for jobs.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, first, I appreciate the comments made by the Senator from South Dakota, emphasizing what can't be done on short terms. I think we have been talking about that all morning.

Last week, 100 mayors from across the Nation wrote to the Senate leaders urging for a long-term transportation bill. They said, "If the status quo continues, deficient transportation infrastructure will cost American businesses \$430 billion by 2020."

Then there are the 31 construction and transportation groups that sent a harsh reminder to Congress that "past extensions have not led to a lasting solution to the Highway Trust Fund's repeated revenue shortfalls."

I remember because I have been around here for a while, and I have been through six of these transportation reauthorization bills. In the interim, we always end up with short-term extensions. People don't realize we can't do major projects with short-term extensions.

Now, I hear the argument sometimes that in this one we have a 6-year bill, but we are paying for only 3 years. That is fine. Make the argument. But there is something unique in the transportation system, which is that in the event we get through halfway—even though it is a 6-year bill—and the funds are not available to the existing shortages of what we have added, then all projects stop. Not a penny can be spent. This isn't true anywhere else in our government, and I think people have to realize that if we are going to do it.

When the Senator from Minnesota was talking and showing these very graphic pictures of the bridge that collapsed killing 13 people, that really sends something home. We can't wait until that happens before we do the responsible thing.

I have to remind my conservative friends it is our constitutional duty. When we were sworn into office, we swore to uphold the Constitution of the United States. The Constitution in article I, section 8 tells us what we are supposed to be doing: We are supposed to be defending America, including our bridges and roads. That is what we are supposed to be doing.

There is a way. I hope the people who—unless they just don't want to take care of these big, serious problems and want to continue with the short-term extensions, there is a way we can do this. We will be asking for unanimous consent to go ahead and make a vote on what we are voting on right now and considering. If all time has to expire, it would be 5 a.m. tomorrow on the Inhofe substitute for the bill. That means we then wouldn't get around to having this bill passed until Thursday, and Thursday would be after the House is gone. So it is over. That is it. This would be a very easy thing to do.

Again, I am going to remind people that while we don't have the chance for amendments after this vote takes

place, we can still have the manager's amendment, where I personally will consider every one of the amendments that comes forth. I am hoping that will happen.

That is what we are faced with right now.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:35 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

HIRE MORE HEROES ACT OF 2015— Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, this Friday, July 31, the authorization for the highway trust fund will expire and the fund itself will be nearly out of money. That means that unless Congress acts, projects in New Hampshire and across the country will grind to an abrupt halt. In the face of this, the House has passed yet another short-term, stopgap bill. The Senate is now debating and amending a long-term highway bill.

My clear preference is for a long-term bill. I think it would be a terrible mistake to pass yet another short-term extension without at the same time taking action on a long-term bill like the Senate is currently doing. Only passing another short-term extension—which would be the 34th since 2008—without taking steps toward a multiyear bill would be kicking the can down the road, and in this case the road is overwhelmed by traffic, badly in need of modernization, and filled with patches and potholes. If you have driven around on the roads in the District of Columbia, sometimes you wonder where you are because they are so bad, so filled with potholes. For a country that seeks to remain competitive in the 21st century, as we do in America, this is totally dysfunctional and destructive.

There are few more basic and necessary functions of government than providing for modernized highways, bridges, and other transportation infrastructure. Yet in Congress we have been grossly neglecting this responsibility. China spends about 9 percent of gross domestic product on infrastructure. Brazil spends about 8 percent. Even in Europe they are spending about 4 percent. But infrastructure spending in the United States has fallen to just 2 percent of GDP.

Our highways and bridges face an \$800 billion backlog of investment needs, including nearly half a trillion dollars in critical repair work. Americans spend a staggering 5.5 billion hours stuck in traffic each year. Yet in early May we saw a budget pass out of this Congress

supported by the majority party that slashed Federal funding for transportation by 40 percent over the next decade.

I am especially concerned about disrepair and decay among our Nation's bridges. That is why I filed an amendment which is a bill I have introduced in previous Congresses called the SAFE Bridges Act. The Federal Highway Administration has identified more than 145,000—145,000—structurally deficient or functionally obsolete bridges. That is more than 20 percent of all the bridges in the United States. In New Hampshire it is actually a higher percentage.

In May, I went with the mayor and city manager of Concord—New Hampshire's State capital—to inspect the rusted-out and now-closed Sewalls Falls Bridge, which is one of the three critical bridges in Concord across the Merrimack River. I worked very hard with the city—our office did—to get necessary approvals from the U.S. Department of Transportation to replace this bridge. In fact, it is a replacement project that started back in 1994. The city of Concord lined up all the permits and approvals—and then nothing. Because of uncertainty about Federal funding for the project, it was stopped dead in its tracks.

My amendment, the SAFE Bridges Act, would authorize an additional \$2 billion annually for the next 3 years to enable States to repair and replace their structurally deficient or functionally obsolete bridges. States would get funding based on their share of deficient bridges nationwide, and the additional funding is fully paid for by closing a corporate tax loophole.

As the Senate continues to debate the Transportation bill, I hope we do get an opportunity to vote on relevant amendments like my SAFE Bridges Act.

The neglect of our transportation infrastructure is creating congestion and gridlock on our roads. It is hurting our economy and our global competitiveness. It is also killing jobs—especially in the construction trades, where employment has yet to recover from the great recession.

According to a Duke University study, providing Federal funding to meet the U.S. Department of Transportation's infrastructure requests would create nearly 2.5 million new jobs. So our investment in this industry, which is one of the slowest recovering from the recession, would create millions of new jobs.

Several months ago, I joined in a bipartisan group of eight Senators who had previously served as Governors—Senators KING, ROUNDS, KAINE, HOEVEN, WARNER, CARPER, MANCHIN, and myself. We sent a letter to our Senate colleagues urging that we commit to fully funding national infrastructure priorities and that we put a stop to the dysfunctional short-term fixes that have become routine in recent years.