Arapahoe, Adams, Washington, Yuma, Morgan, Logan, Phillips, and Sedgwick counties have been in close contact with me since 1998 as we planned, along with state and federal offices, where the Port-to-Plains corridor would run through these eastern plains counties of Colorado. The economy on the eastern plains of Colorado, heavily dependent upon farming, ranching, and businesses associated with agriculture, is struggling as the farm economy across the nation currently is. Obviously, the Ports-to-Plains Trade Corridor would aid in the rejuvenation of this struggling agricultural economy as more commerce would be moving through the area, thereby creating opportunity for new business and jobs on the America's high plains.

Mr. Speaker, I am concerned there is a strong possibility the Ports-to-Plains Corridor could bypass eastern Colorado by proceeding northwest from Dumas, Texas, through New Mexico, and onto Interstate 25. Should proponents of the rider be successful in attaching the language to the FY 2001 Labor, Health, and Human Services Appropriation bill, there is a good chance eastern Colorado would not be included in the Ports-to-Plains Trade Corridor. Obviously, I cannot vote for a bill possibly allowing a tremendous economic plan for so many of the constituents I represent to slip away.

There are other problems with this premature designation. The four affected States, Colorado, Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma, are participating in a federally funded highway study entitled the Ports-to-Plains Corridor Feasibility Study. The study is being conducted by independent consulting firm Wilbur Smith Associates. The Texas Department of Transportation initially contracted Wilbur Smith Associates to conduct the study which was funded by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The Colorado, Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma departments of transportation sit on the Ports-to-Plains Feasibility Study Steering Committee so as to maximize communication and opportunities between the four states.

According to Wilbur Smith Associates, the purpose of the study is to ''to determine the feasibility of highway improvements between Denver, Colorado and the Texas/Mexico border, via existing IH 27 corridor between Amarillo and Lubbock, Texas.'' Wilbur Smith Associates has diligently kept the public informed by public meetings. ''Two series of public meetings will be conducted for this project. . . . The second series of public meetings to be held around mid-January 2001 will present findings of the detailed evaluation of alternatives,'' according to Wilbur Smith Associates. The Transportation Subcommittee on Appropriations crafted the Ports-to-Plains Corridor project around the dates of this feasibility so as to allow the state departments of transportation ample time to make a recommendation to their elected federal officials.

Wilbur Smith Associates informs me the target completion for the draft report is March 2001, while the target completion date of the final report is April or May 2001. Mr. Speaker, why proceed with route designations before the study to determine the best route is completed? I would encourage the Congress to slow down and allow Wilbur Smith Associates to complete this federally funded highway study before the federal government is allowed to supersede local and state authority, and preclude suitable public input.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the only highway study being conducted regarding the Ports-to-Plains Trade Corridor. The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) will soon conduct its own study entitled ''The Eastern Colorado Mobility Study.'' According to CDOT, the ''purpose is to identify the feasibility of improving existing and/or building possible future transportation corridors and inter-modal terminals in eastern Colorado that will enhance the mobility of freight services within and through eastern Colorado.'' While the Eastern Colorado Mobility Study will be a comprehensive study, it will incorporate the Ports-to-Plains Trade Corridor. According to the Project Manager at CDOT, it has selected a consulting team, but the contract has not even been finalized. Mr. Speaker, again, why designate even a portion of a major trade corridor when the studies designed to plan the corridor have not even begun? For the RECORD, I will submit with these remarks a letter from the Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Transportation requesting no specific highway segments in Colorado be designated. The rider designating the specific route through Texas most likely will have an effect upon Colorado, so in order to uphold the wishes of the State of Colorado, I cannot condone a premature specific designation.

There is another matter at stake which potentially supersedes all others, and this is the issue of safety. The Colorado Department of Transportation has consistently and strongly opposed a route designation which would result in heavier traffic on Interstate 25. CDOT opposes more truck traffic on I–25, particularly between the congested I–25 segment of Pueblo and Fort Collins. Mr. Speaker, I hereby submit Colorado Resolution TC–798 for the RECORD, crafted by the Colorado Department of Transportation, detailing CDOT's specific position on this safety issue. Again, there is no way I can vote for the Fiscal Year 2001 Labor, Health, and Human Services Appropriations bill when it contains a provision that would cause a severe safety hazard along the most congested interstate and contradict the Colorado Department of Transportation's adamant position.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I understand there is language regarding the Ports-to-Plains Corridor mandating the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) submit a route recommendation to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, and the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee should Colorado, Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico not reach a unified consensus by September 30, 2001. While I understand obtaining route consensus between the involved states is an arduous task, I believe the September 30, 2001 deadline will be difficult to achieve considering the magnitude of the Ports-to-Plains Trade Corridor. Furthermore, I am concerned the FHWA's decision might not be the most appropriate one, and possibly would go against the relevant state departments of transportation studies and agreements. Highway planning should be determined by local governments and state departments of transportation, not dictated by a few. Mr. Speaker, It would be most prudent for Congress to withdraw this unwarranted rider included in the FY 2001 Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriation bill.

STATE OF COLORADO,
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION,
Denver, CO, May 9, 2000.

Hon. ROBERT SCHAFFER,
U.S. House of Representatives, Cannon House Office Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN SCHAFFER: CDOT is very interested in the Borders and Corridors Program for Colorado and certainly would like to have a designation. However, there are several north-south corridors in eastern Colorado under consideration. It is difficult to determine at this time which corridor would best serve the interests of the people of Colorado as well as appropriate connections with neighboring states. The Transportation Commission needs to make a policy decision on this issue before proceeding with any official designation. CDOT is initiating a Feasibility Study to determine the best corridor for the state and provide a connecting corridor from the Texas Ports to Plains Transportation Corridor to the Heartland Express Corridor. This effort will be underway later this year.

Therefore, we would request that no specific highway segments in Colorado be designated until the Feasibility Study has been completed.

Sincerely,

THOMAS E. NORTON,
Executive Director.

From: Cavaliere, Dianne
Sent: Friday, January 21, 2000
To: Phillips, Joel
Subject: Ports to Plains Resolution

Resolution Number TC–798

Whereas, Ports to Plains was identified in TEA 21 as a ''High Priority Corridor'' in the ''Borders and Corridors'' Program; and

Whereas, CDOT supports this program as a long term corridor optimization program for trade and commerce pursuant to NAFTA; and

Whereas, the Ports to Plains program coincides with the Transportation Commission's policy for Management of the Transportation System by ensuring partnership with local governments, as well as other states, in order to facilitate the movement of people, goods, information and services; and

Whereas, CDOT is committed diverting traffic from congested segments of I–25 through infrastructure improvement in eastern Colorado and views the Ports to Plains program as an opportunity to pursue such goals.

Now, therefore, be it resolved that CDOT supports the Ports to Plains Feasibility Study (sponsored by TxDOT) and the pursuit of Federal discretionary funding for Ports to Plains through the ''Borders and Corridors'' program.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JULIA CARSON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 14, 2000

Ms. CARSON. Mr. Speaker, I was unavoidably absent yesterday, Monday, November 13, 2000, and as a result, missed rollcall votes 595 through 596. Had I been present, I would have voted ''nay'' on rollcall vote 595, ''yea'' on rollcall vote 596.