

allow California high-speed rail to move forward.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. I also would like to thank Chairman MURRAY and Chairman MIKULSKI for your explanation.

I am deeply alarmed by attempts in the other body of Congress to prohibit the Department of Transportation and the Surface Transportation Board from completing their permitting and oversight responsibly.

These attempts violate the spirit of federalism. The California high-speed rail project was approved by California's voters on the ballot, the legislature has enacted enabling legislation, and the Governor supports it.

While some may not like this type of transportation investment, it is the choice that my State has made for their future, and the Federal Government should respect those decisions.

Furthermore, I strongly believe the Federal permitting process should not be used as a tool to obstruct and delay major infrastructure investments of our States.

Permitting infrastructure in California is a notoriously thorough, long, and comprehensive process. In the years California has analyzed this one project, China has built thousands of miles of high-speed rail.

But this year, in an attempt to stymie the project, opponents of California's plan forced the Surface Transportation Board—an agency dedicated to protecting fair competition in freight rail—to assert Federal jurisdiction over California's high-speed rail project.

This new layer of Federal permitting is duplicative of the thorough 5-year-long review performed by the Federal Railroad Administration. Nonetheless, State and Federal entities complied with this extraneous requirement. However, now opponents are working vigorously to stall the actions at the Surface Transportation Board that will allow construction to finally begin in earnest.

Fortunately, the Surface Transportation Board exists to facilitate the growth of rail in the United States—not to impede it. As long as the Board acts quickly within its statutory authority, it will not impede California's decisions.

Mrs. BOXER. I also share the concerns expressed by Senator FEINSTEIN, and I would also like to reiterate that the people of California voted to fund this project. The California State Legislature voted to fund this project, and the Department of Transportation, after weighing a number of applications for high-speed rail across the Nation, decided to fund this project. I find it troubling that opponents have attempted to hinder the advancement of this project by curtailing an independent agency's mission and responsibilities, as well as trying to prohibit the transmission of appropriated funds to its rightful destination.

I am pleased that this legislation will allow the Surface Transportation

Board to act within its statutory authority. I also see that the legislation will allow the Federal Railroad Administration to administer its previously awarded grants to California, and I thank Chairman MURRAY for advancing this legislation.

I would also like to note that this project is incredibly important to the future of California. California's 170,000 miles of roadway are the busiest in the Nation, with automobile congestion draining \$18.7 billion in lost time and wasted fuel from the State's economy every year.

Additionally, flights between Los Angeles and the Bay area, which is the busiest short-haul market in the United States with 5 million passengers annually, are the most delayed in the country, with approximately one in every four flights late by an hour or more.

California's high-speed rail system will not only increase mobility and save lost time and money over the coming decades, it will also create near-and long-term employment opportunities, enhance environmental and energy goals, and spur economic development.

Mrs. MURRAY. As my colleagues know, California has a grant agreement with the Department of Transportation, and California has spent funds consistent with that agreement. I was extremely careful to draft the Senate bill to ensure that California will be able to be reimbursed for their expenses.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Thank you, Chairman MURRAY, for ensuring that California will not be left holding the bag, which is not a fair way for the Federal Government to treat the States. Were an appropriations bill to prevent the Federal Government from honoring its grant commitments, it would set a dangerous precedent. I am concerned that it would undermine the competitive process.

RECESS

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

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:57 p.m., recessed until 2 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. COONS).

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF SAMANTHA POWER TO BE THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Samantha Power, of Massa-

chusetts, to be the Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 2 hours of debate equally divided between the proponents and the opponents.

The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I am pleased to strongly support the nomination of Samantha Power to be the next United States Ambassador to the United Nations, and I commend President Obama for selecting her for this extremely important position.

Born of Irish parents and raised in Ireland until she was 9, Samantha and her parents emigrated to Pennsylvania and Georgia, and she attended Yale and Harvard.

She is well known for her accomplishments as a journalist during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, her Pulitzer Prize-winning book, "A Problem from Hell," her leadership of the Carr Center for Human Rights, and her work as the senior director for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights at the National Security Council.

Samantha is a person of extraordinary intellect, exceptional integrity, and a strong moral compass. She is willing to challenge conventional wisdom and fight for things she feels passionately about, irrespective of the forces aligned against her.

Samantha is an internationalist. She believes in the indispensable role that multilateral organizations play in addressing global problems no country can solve alone—from genocide to global warming to international terrorism.

At the National Security Council she also brought much-needed attention to human trafficking, protection for refugees, gay rights, and gender-based violence. But what some people may be less aware of is the depth of Samantha's devotion to the principles on which this country was founded, and which I believe is one of the key reasons the President nominated her.

Samantha is an American patriot. She will not only strive to ensure that the United States leads by example at the United Nations, but that we do so in a manner that honors the Constitution and the idealism of those who wrote it, which continue to inspire people around the world. That is what people expect of the United States, and I know of no one better suited to turn that expectation into reality.

At a time when the United States faces emerging threats and intensifying competition for natural resources, human rights are under assault in many countries, and millions of people live in squalor or have fled their homes due to armed conflict, natural disasters, or the effects of overpopulation and climate change on the availability of land, water and food, how effectively we use our influence globally will determine the kind of world our children and grandchildren inherit.