

get the Chair's attention, but I was not able to do so.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HULSOFF). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. NORTON addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. RIGGS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. RIGGS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EWING) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. EWING addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

CONGRESS MUST REFORM THE NATION'S TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM AND REGAIN THE PUBLIC'S TRUST

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. COBURN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss a matter of grave concern to me and many of my colleagues. I am in great hope that the American public is paying attention to what I am about to say.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to talk about transportation dollars and budget authority and busting the budget. The transportation dollars that are being handled in this country are being handled in a way that I believe does not support the best interests of the American public nor support the quality of this institution.

Next week the House will be asked to vote on a transportation bill that could cost the American taxpayers \$216 billion, money they have already paid into a taxpayers' fund. This will make this bill one of the largest public works

in our history. The chairman of the Committee on the Budget has called the bill an "abomination" because it will bust the budget by at least \$26 billion. That is \$26 billion that we are going to pass on to our next generation. We have the assurances that this will be paid for in conference. Anybody that has been here for any length of time knows that that is not much in terms of assurance.

This Congress has made important steps toward reversing the fiscal irresponsibility of its recent past, and we must stay that course. We must not lose our bearings when we are so close to making significant strides towards reducing our \$5.5 trillion debt.

I want to explain to the American people how transportation dollars are divided up in this country and where that process is corrupt and needs to be reformed. Every time Americans fill their cars up with gas, a few cents goes towards a massive Federal transportation fund. Congress has set up a committee to divide these funds. Each member of this committee exercises enormous influence over where these dollars are spent.

Every Member of Congress has the authority to request special projects, based on the needs of their district and the recommendations of their respective State's Department of Transportation. Money should be awarded to these projects based solely on their merit, but this is often not the case, as anyone who has observed this process recently will admit.

Instead of dividing transportation money according to the merit of projects, money is divided based on political favors and political expediency. Stories in today's Associated Press will help explain what I mean.

The AP reports North Dakota and South Dakota are similar in size and population, but when it comes to the House's highway bill, they are nothing alike. The bill earmarks \$60 million in special projects for South Dakota, six times as much as its neighbor to the north.

Mr. Speaker, let me ask my colleagues and the American public a question. Is it likely that the projects in South Dakota have six times more merit as the projects in North Dakota, or is there some political motivation involved?

In Minnesota, one district out of the eight congressional districts in that State received \$80 million of the \$140 million earmarked for projects in that State. Does that one district have such a disproportionate need for highway funds, or is there some other reason for this imbalance in funding? Is it a coincidence that an inordinately high proportion of transportation funds are targeted to districts represented by members of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure? Is it a coincidence that this bill sends outrageous sums of money to members in both parties who will face difficult reelections?

Also, if my colleagues examine this bill, they will find striking disparities

in the amount of money one State receives over another, regardless of what they put into the trust fund.

Mr. Speaker, I invite the public and the press to examine this bill and decide for themselves whether this money is being divided according to merit or to politics. This bill includes over 1,400 special projects. In 1987, President Reagan vetoed a bill that had 150 such projects, which is just one-tenth the number in this bill.

We should ask ourselves what the typical American thinks of this process. I think we know. The public finds that it is sick, dirty, and corrupt, and a throwback to the system of "good ol' boys" that we came here in 1994 to end. We have \$5.5 trillion worth of debt in this country. We cannot afford to play games with the public's money and more importantly we cannot afford to play games with the public's trust.

That is why I and several of my colleagues turned down funds in this year's highway transportation bill. I made a statement to the press that the committee had approached me in hopes of buying my vote. I stand by that statement.

But this is not an issue of one Member against another Member or one Member against a committee. This issue is about whether Congress will continue to look the other way on a system that encourages Members to do the inappropriate and wrong things. This system not only wastes the public's money, it degrades the public's trust in this institution. It is difficult to put a dollar value on trust because it is invaluable. As legislators, the public's trust is our most precious and scarce resource. Once that trust is lost, we all know it is hard to earn it back.

If this Congress and the class of 1994 is known for one thing, I hope it is for our unwavering crusade to regain the public trust. Without that trust, we are governed by suspicion, cynicism, and our society cannot be sustained for long with that foundation.

We can blame the spread of this acidic public cynicism on a variety of familiar culprits: the liberal media, a debased entertainment industry, voter apathy, and Presidential scandal. All of these factors have played a role, but we are wise to first seek improvement among the group we can most directly effect—ourselves. The Congress has lost the confidence of the public, and it is our duty to do what we can to win it back.

The typical American believes politicians are more concerned about preserving their position than the long-term consequences of their policies, and this system perpetuates that perception.

Reforming this system will be an important step in that process. We should let the states make decisions about transportation funding and get it out the hands of Washington.

We must do the right thing for the country on this issue before we throw away more of the public's money and trust.

Today, I believe the greatest temptation facing legislators in our party is to postpone doing the right thing for the country until our position as the majority party is more secure.