

A teacher's assistant or a bus driver should be focused on their precious students, not how they are going to keep the electricity on at home or clothe a growing child or stave off an army of bill collectors.

I remain hopeful that our colleagues in the other body will reward the dedication of Head Start teachers by adequately funding the Head Start Program. I also remain hopeful that the Dane County Parent Council will recognize the value of their workers through expeditious resolution of the remaining economic and noneconomic disputes in their contract.

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

(Mr. SOUDER 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 Arkansas (Mr. BERRY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BERRY 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 Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. BLACKBURN 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 Michigan (Mr. SMITH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. SMITH of Michigan 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 Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

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TEA-LU EQUALS JOBS, JOBS, JOBS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FRANKS of Arizona). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. LIPINSKI) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. LIPINSKI. Mr. Speaker, on May 14 of this year, after months and months of delay, the administration finally released their TEA-21 reauthorization proposal. Called SAFETEA, the administration's proposal will authorize \$247 billion for surface transportation programs.

In contrast, TEA-21 authorized \$218 billion over 6 years for our Nation's surface transportation needs. While the landmark legislation made tremendous advancements towards addressing those needs, we still have much work to do. The next reauthorization must advance on the successes and priorities of TEA-21 and take into account our future needs as well.

Unfortunately, SAFETEA fails miserably in that regard. When we factor in inflation, SAFETEA's \$247 billion funding level would mean a flatline of current transportation spending.

While I admire the administration's laser-like focus on flatlining surface transportation investments in their proposal, the fact of the matter is that SAFETEA is shortsighted and inadequate.

The administration's SAFETEA proposal is too little, too late, especially in today's gloomy economy. We now have 6.1 percent unemployment rate. This is the highest level since July, 1994. The unemployment rate for construction workers is even higher at 7.1 percent. In a time where nearly 9 million Americans are out of work, over 4 million Americans are underemployed, and nearly 2 million Americans have been out of a job for more than 6 months, we need something more than SAFETEA.

What this Nation needs is a bold and innovative economic stimulus plan. What this Nation needs is a robust public works funding package, and what the administration has proposed just is not it.

What we need is the proposal laid out by the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. Under the leadership of the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG), the committee is working on a \$375 billion reauthorization bill. Mr. Speaker, \$375 billion is within the funding levels recommended by the U.S. DOT's "Conditions and Performance Report." Mr. Speaker, \$375 billion is needed to maintain and improve our highways and transit systems.

I strongly believe that TEA-LU will adequately fund our national surface transportation needs. And just as important, it will be a shot in the arm for our struggling national economy. It will create jobs and put people back to work.

Over the last several months, much of the debate has centered on the highway user fee, or gas tax. User fees and taxes are never popular, but leadership requires making tough decisions.

Let us be perfectly clear. I support an increase in the highway user fee. I support depositing these revenues in the Highway Trust Fund to pay for surface transportation needs, and I do not stand alone on this.

In fact, I stand with the majority of Americans on this issue. In a poll conducted by Zogby International in June 2003, 67 percent of those surveyed supported an increase in the highway user fee of up to 5 cents per gallon, provided those revenues went towards infrastructure improvements.

Putting this into perspective, a 5-cent increase in the highway user fee on gasoline will cost the average motorist an additional \$30 per year, which is about the same price as an oil change nowadays.

Instead of getting bogged down with the concept of user fees and taxes, we should all take a page from the history books.

Let us look back to 1982. Let us not forget that this Nation was in the midst of a recession when Ronald Wilson Reagan, a native Illinoisan, signed into law the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1982, a bill that raised the gas tax by 5 cents. In his wisdom, he knew the importance of increasing highway and transit funding. He knew the importance of investing for the future. He knew that the cost to the average motorist would be small, while the benefits to the national transportation system would be immense. But most importantly, Ronald Reagan knew that a \$151 billion surface transportation funding bill would create jobs and provide immense benefits for a sluggish economy stuck in a recession back in 1982.

Reagan also pointed out that the gas tax is not a tax, it is a user fee. An increase in the highway user fee would simply be deposited in the Highway Trust Fund, and there it would be used to improve our Nation's transportation system and would have no impact on our Federal deficit.

Highway user fees are, as President Reagan noted, simply good tax policy.

His successor, President George Herbert Walker Bush, also recognized the importance of public works investments and economic vitality. When he signed ISTEA into law in 1991, he said the highway bill could be summed up in three words: "jobs, jobs, jobs." That is just as true today.

Each \$1 billion invested in infrastructure creates 47,500 jobs and \$6.1 billion in related economic activity. For the price of a few cents per gallon, we can craft a \$375 billion transportation investment bill that would potentially create millions of new jobs. That is an investment for our American working families today as well as an investment for our Nation's future. For the price of a simple oil change, we can reauthorize the Highway Trust Fund at \$375 billion. It would not only ensure our transportation system will be second to none in the world; it would also create jobs and stimulate the economy without impacting the Federal deficit. What is not to like?

But right here, right now, it is really about jobs, jobs, jobs. We need to create good-paying jobs. We need to put people back to work. We need a \$375 billion surface transportation bill.

Let us not lose sight of these public policy objectives in these trying economic times.

In conclusion, let me once again say that the sure way to improve this economy, to improve transportation, to improve highways in this country is to