

Mr. Speaker, I listened to the explanation of my friend, the gentleman from New York, and I agree with a number of the things he said. There will be a large, bipartisan majority supporting this extension, but the notion that somehow there are not problems associated with the repeated failure of Congress to pass, despite what my friend from New York says, what should be one of the easiest bills. We can take the bill that passed the Senate and put it on the floor of the House, and I am quite confident that it would pass with an overwhelming majority. It passed the other body with some 72 or 73 votes. The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure offered up an approach to the Floor of the House that was substantially above that level. We have assembled the broadest coalition in the history of infrastructure legislation. We have interests ranging from the Sierra Club to the Chamber of Commerce, from the Women's Federation Garden Club of America to the cyclists, to the people who put down asphalt, who all agree on the basic structure of this legislation.

There has been a lot of hard work on behalf of the gentleman from Alaska and the gentleman from Minnesota to try and craft a piece of legislation that is acceptable. I see on the floor here my friends, the gentleman from Wisconsin and the gentleman from Illinois, who have been working, chairing the subcommittee, trying to put something forward underneath these artificial restrictions.

But the point is that it is not a failure of agreement between the Members of the two bodies of Congress. We are substantially in agreement, and we are in agreement with the vast majority of the American public. And the failure to allow that agreement to be fully and fairly debated on this floor and enacted means that we are holding in suspense important transportation priorities.

Yes, we are going to allow the spigot to be opened, or rather, we will avoid slamming the spigot closed at midnight tonight. I do not think anybody in their right mind thinks that we would or should do that. But that does not mean that there are not negative problems associated with it. We have projects in the Pacific Northwest that were slated to go forward that are multiyear in nature, and because of the uncertainty, these are on hold; significant problems that speak to economic development, that speak to environmental protection, to reducing congestion. And it is not just in the northwest. It is New York. It is in Massachusetts. It is Florida and Texas.

If we talk to any of the transportation officials, they will tell us that we are not well served having to repeatedly come to the floor with a short-term extension. But I am going to argue in support of this 8-month extension because, frankly, it is better to kick the can down the road past the election. We have shown that we are not really capable of doing that in an election year. With a new Congress, maybe with a new administration, without the pre-election posturing, I think we will, in fact, have a better piece of legislation. Were we to enact a flawed piece of legislation, it would not just be a problem for today or tomorrow; we would be crippling

our transportation initiatives for the entire 6-year period of the authorization, and it would establish an artificially low standard for subsequent reauthorizations. We would be severely penalizing transportation for a generation to come.

I hope that, in the course of the next 8 months, but particularly in the course of the next 5 weeks, the American public takes the time to pin down the politicians in the House, in the Senate, running for President, about where they stand on transportation infrastructure. This is the most important transportation piece of legislation for the next 6 years. It is also the most important economic development legislation, and done right, it is the most important environmental legislation.

This should have been the easiest piece of legislation for this Congress to pass. Sadly, we are seeing today that it has proven that we are not up to the challenge. I hope we can take these next 8 months and do better by the American public.