

Mr. Speaker, at a time when the eyes of the capital and the news media are focused on the Judiciary deliberations and the scope and authority of impeachment inquiry, when others are struggling to deal with the slaughter in Kosovo, it is hard perhaps for us to give attention to the mounting global economic crisis and the role that United States leadership will play. Yet I sincerely believe that world peace, alleviating human suffering and poverty, and averting environmental disaster are all tied in the long run to the United States economic leadership far more than military might.

Ten days ago we suffered a setback on the floor of the House of Representatives with the rejection of the fast track authority, not just the rejection of that authority itself, but how and why it was done. I do believe that America's Presidents need the ability to negotiate some treaties that Congress votes on on an up-or-down basis. Every President since Richard Nixon has had that power. Recently the authority for the Clinton administration expired, and it has been unable to be renewed. Last year we were close to a vote, but because it was deemed that we were short of the votes and we could not afford a defeat, the matter was withdrawn.

This year with the world economy in turmoil, Asia in crisis and the United States stock market on a volatile roller coaster, a vote was scheduled and forced through without bipartisan leadership, without the discussion of the areas of concern, without administration backing. The result was to lose at least 20 Republicans from last year's tally, over a third of the Democrats, either changed their vote to no or present, and it froze a number of sympathetic lawmakers who had legitimate concerns into a no column without working either to accommodate or even to listen to their concerns. This will have consequences far beyond the fast track authority.

At a time when over half the world's people are under some threat of sanction from the United States, we do not know how to evaluate them, how to stop them. For example, with the Pakistan-India situation, United States sanctions simply penalized American farmers and we quickly backtracked. The United States has more difficulty with its China relationship than any other country in the world, and we have significant global environmental concerns to be worked out with the World Bank, with the IMF.

Mr. Speaker, these are not simple items, they are not items that we can ignore, and reckless partisan behavior, for example, as we had on fast track gets us nowhere. We need to start now to repair the damage in the remaining days of this session, and even more important, we need to be clear-eyed, cooperative and thoughtful in our approach to America's role as a leader in the global economy for the next Congress. The stakes are simply too high for us to be diverted by the media issue du jour or attempts to gain partisan advantage.