

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

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Remarks by the President on Transportation Bill and FAA Bill Extension

Rose Garden

Note the corrected name of the employer of the individuals mentioned below:

*Adam Vencill and Chris Negley, KCI Technologies

**Hector Sealey and Austin Anderson, Ft. Myer Construction Corporation

10:45 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning, everybody. Please have a seat. I want to say a few words about an issue that affects thousands of American workers, as well as millions of Americans who drive on our nation's roads and bridges every single day.

At the end of September, if Congress doesn't act, the transportation bill will expire. This bill provides funding for highway construction, bridge repair, mass transit systems and other essential projects that keep our people and our commerce moving quickly and safely. And for construction workers and their families across the country, it represents the difference between making ends meet or not making ends meet.

If we allow the transportation bill to expire, over 4,000 workers will be immediately furloughed without pay. If it's delayed for just 10 days, it will lose nearly \$1 billion in highway funding -- that's money we can never get back. And if it's delayed even longer, almost one million workers could lose their jobs over the course of the next year.

That includes some of the folks behind me today. We've got Adam Vencill and Chris Negley who are with the Federal Highway Administration.* We've got Hector Sealey and Austin Anderson who work for the Fort Myers Construction Company.** If we don't extend this bill by the end of September, all of them will be out of a job -- just because of politics in Washington.

And that's just not acceptable. That's inexcusable. It's inexcusable to put more jobs at risk in an industry that's already been one of the hardest hit over the last decade. It's inexcusable to cut off necessary investments at a time when so many of our highways are choked with congestion, when so many of our bridges are in need of repair, when so many commuters depend on reliable public transit, and when travel and shipping delays cost businesses billions of dollars every single year.

Now, if this story sounds familiar, that's because we've heard it before. Just a few weeks ago, Congress refused to act on another bill, typically a routine bill, that would have ended up pulling thousands of aviation workers off the job and delaying necessary airport improvement projects across the country. And when Congress finally got their act together, they only funded the FAA until September 16th. That's why, when they come back next month, not only do they need to pass the transportation bill but they've also got to pass a clean extension of that FAA bill -- for longer this time -- and address back pay for the workers who were laid off during the last shutdown.

At a time when a lot of people in Washington are talking about creating jobs, it's time to stop the political gamesmanship that can actually cost us hundreds of thousands of jobs. This should not be a Democratic issue or a Republican issue. This transportation bill has been renewed seven times in the last two years alone. That's why my Secretary of Transportation, Ray LaHood -- a Republican -- is with me today, along with David Chavern from the Chamber of Commerce, and Rich Trumka of the AFL-CIO -- two organizations who don't always see eye-to-eye on things -- because they agree on how important it is for our economy that Congress act now.

So I'm calling on Congress, as soon as they come back, to pass a clean extension of the surface transportation bill, along with a clean extension of the FAA bill, to give workers and communities across America the confidence that vital construction projects won't come to a halt.

After that's done, I'm also proposing that we reform the way transportation money is invested, to eliminate waste, to give states more control over the projects that are right for them, and to make sure that we're getting better results for the money that we spend. We need to stop funding projects based on whose district they're in, and start funding them based on how much good they're going to be doing for the American people. No more bridges to nowhere. No more projects that are simply funded because of somebody pulling strings. And we need to do this all in a way that gets the private sector more involved. That's how we're going to put construction workers back to work right now doing the work that America needs done -- not just to boost our economy this year, but for the next 20 years.

Finally, in keeping with a recommendation from my Jobs Council, today I'm directing certain federal agencies to identify high-priority infrastructure projects that can put people back to work. And these projects -- these are projects that are already funded, and with some focused attention, we could expedite the permitting decisions and reviews necessary to get construction underway more quickly while still protecting safety, public health, and the environment.

Tomorrow in Dallas, my Jobs Council will meet with local jobs -- local business owners and other folks about what we've done so far to rebuild our infrastructure and what we can do to make sure that America is moving even faster in getting people back to work.

That's what we're going to need to do in the short term -- keep people on the job, keep vital projects moving forward, fund projects that are already underway in a smarter way. Of course, if we're honest, we also know that when it comes to our nation's infrastructure -- our roads, our railways, mass transit, airports -- we shouldn't just be playing patch-up or catch-up, we should be leading the world. Ten years ago, our nation's infrastructure was ranked 6th globally. Today, it's 23rd. We invest half as much in our infrastructure as we did 50 years ago, with more than one and a half the number of people. Everybody can see the consequences.

And that's unacceptable for a nation that's always dreamed big and built big -- from transcontinental railroads to the Interstate Highway System. And it's unacceptable when countries like China are building high-speed rail networks and gleaming new airports while more than a million construction workers who could be doing the same thing are unemployed right here in America.

And so when Congress is back next week, in addition to passing these clean extensions to prevent any halt on existing work, we're going to have to have a serious conversation in this country about making real, lasting investments in our infrastructure -- from better ports to a smarter electric grid; from high-speed Internet to high-speed rail. And at a time when interest rates are low and workers are unemployed, the best time to make those investments is right now -- not once another levee fails or another bridge falls. Right now is when we need to be making these decisions.

Now is the time for Congress to extend the transportation bill, keep our workers on the job. Now is the time to put our country before party and to give certainty to the people who are just trying to get by. There is work to be done. There are workers ready to do it. And that's why I expect Congress to act immediately.

And to all the folks who are here on the stage, thank you for the outstanding work you're doing in helping to maintain our nation's infrastructure.

Thank you very much, everybody. (Applause.)

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10:54 A.M. EDT