



U.S. Congressman
Nick Rahall
WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RAHALL: THREAT TO AMERICA IS NOT COMMUNISM, IT'S COMPETITION

WASHINGTON, D.C.-- Before the House Public Works Surface Transportation Subcommittee hearing on transportation policy in the next decade, U.S. Rep Nick Rahall (D-WV) challenged Secretary of Transportation Samuel F. Skinner that our number one threat to American livelihood today is, "not communism, it is competition. Our frontline of defense is a sound efficient infrastructure."

Rahall, outraged with the increasing lack of federal involvement in our highway and airport needs, spoke out on the expanded role of states in funding their infrastructure needs.

"It is unfathomable to me how they plan to address our infrastructure needs by slashing our financial commitment," said Rahall. "This is not only a crisis for my state, it is a national priority. Are we to throw up our hands to the heavens every time we face a national need and turn our backs on the American people? West Virginians say no, I say no, and I hope our committee and this Congress will say no. It is time we faced our responsibilities to the country again."

"According to recent figures, it is estimated that more than 62 percent of paved roads in the United States are in need of repair, over 220,000 of the nation's 575,000 bridges are either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete, and that some 30 percent of the bridges over 20 feet long are at least 50 years old which is the average life-span for a bridge.

"The price we pay in loss of productivity is astounding. It is estimated that the added cost of driving on bad roads is close to \$16.2 billion, or \$99.60 per driver and that we waste about 1.25 billion vehicle hours and 1.38 billion gallons of gasoline in traffic congestion on limited access highways per year. This is expected to increase to 6.9 billion hours and 7.32 billion gallons of gasoline by the year 2005. These basic national needs must be answered," said Rahall.

However, the administration budget request would do just the opposite. It would reduce Amtrak funding from \$646 million to \$0, UMTA from \$1.8 billion to \$1.4 billion, the essential air service from \$30.6 million to \$23.6 million, and the Appalachian Regional Commission from \$147.9 million to \$50 million.

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HEARING
Before the
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SURFACE TRANSPORTATION
of the
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORTATION
March 8, 1990

OPENING STATEMENT

Congressman Nick J. Rahall

There can be no question that we must act quickly to address our infrastructure problems if we are to remain competitive in the world marketplace. According to recent figures, it is estimated that more than 62% of paved roads in the U.S. are in need of repair, over 220,000 of the Nation's 575,000 bridges are either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete, and that some 30% of the bridges over 20 feet long are at least 50 years old, which is the average life-span of a bridge.

The price we pay in loss of productivity is astounding. It is estimated that the added cost of driving on bad roads is approximately \$16.2 billion, or \$99.60 per driver and that we waste about 1.25 billion vehicle hours and 1.38 billion gallons of gasoline in traffic congestion on limited access highways per year. This is expected to increase to 6.9 billion hours and 7.32 billion gallons of gasoline by the year 2005.

In remarks made before the Transportation Research Board, Secretary Skinner said:

"in the face of...expanding international competition, we no longer can take transportation for granted. We need to maintain, expand, and make our transportation system more productive....As a society, we should realize that when we invest in infrastructure, we not only increase productivity, efficiency, and American competitiveness, but we also attract additional investment from the private sector."

I could not agree more with these sentiments. Yet the President's budget request would reduce Amtrak funding from \$646 million to \$0, UMTA funding from \$1.8 billion to \$1.4 billion, the Essential Air Service from \$30.6 million to \$23.6 million, the Appalachian Regional Commission from \$147.9 million to \$50 million, and the list goes on. I do not see how we will address our infrastructure needs by decreasing our financial commitment.

Based upon how the President's Transportation policy has been described so far, I see only a continuation of this trend. Of most concern to me is the following statement made in an executive summary of the National Transportation Policy:

"Above all, it [the National Transportation Policy] embodies the ongoing shift from a heavy-handed Federal role to greater flexibility for and reliance on State, local, and private sector initiatives and resources."

This says to me quite simply, "yes we have transportation problem, let the states deal with it, the federal government does not have the money." As a representative from West Virginia, I can tell you that the States cannot deal with it, they do not have the money either, and they both need and welcome federal funds.

Mr. Chairman. This is not only a crisis for my state, it is a national priority. Are we to throw up our hands to the heavens every time we face a national need and turn our backs on the American people? West Virginians say no, I say no, and I hope our committee and this Congress will say no. It is time we faced our responsibilities to the country again.

If we are really serious about addressing our infrastructure problem, we will have to reorder our nation's priorities. We will have to stop chasing the most esoteric and costly defensive systems and put the money towards addressing basic infrastructure needs. We must realize that we are no longer fighting a military war, we are fighting an economic war. Our threat is not communism, it is competition. Our front line of defense is a sound, efficient infrastructure.