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Remarks on Signing the Surface Transportation and Veterans Health Care Choice Improvement Act of 2015

July 31, 2015

Well, I am about to sign a 3-month extension of our highway funding. And that's a good thing, because if this wasn't in front of me and ready for signature, we would end up having projects all across the country that would be closing after midnight.

On the other hand, we have now made it a habit where instead of 5-year funding plans for transportation, instead of long-term approaches where we can actually strategize on what are the most important infrastructure projects, how are they getting paid for, providing certainties to Governors and mayors and States and localities about how they are going to approach critical infrastructure projects—roads, bridges, ports, airports—instead, we operate as if we're hand-to-mouth, 3 months at a time, which freezes a lot of construction, which makes people uncertain, which leads to businesses not being willing to hire because they don't have any long-term certainty. It's a bad way for the U.S. Government to do business.

So I want to make sure that before I sign this, Congress gets a clear message, and that is, we should not be leaving all the business of the U.S. Government to the last minute. Think about the things that are still undone as Congress is about to go on vacation. They haven't reauthorized the Export-Import Bank, which creates tens of thousands of jobs all across the country—good-paying jobs—because it increases our exports. When I was in Ethiopia on our trip, we had sold a score of planes to Ethiopian Airlines from Boeing; that produces jobs not just in Boeing's plant in Seattle, but across the supply chain—small businesses and medium-sized businesses, all who benefit from us being able to facilitate the sale of U.S. products to other countries.

I had a group of small-businesspeople here with employees ranging from 12 employees to 500 employees who were saying that their business sales were starting to be affected by congressional inaction on what has traditionally, for 81 years, been a bipartisan support of the Export-Import Bank. That needs to get done.

Congress has had all year to do a budget, and yet Congress is leaving on vacation without the budget done. And when they get back, they're going to have about 2 weeks in order to do the people's business. And this is going to be critical. We've got big issues that we have to deal with on the defense side, in terms of making sure that we're paying for our campaign against ISIL, the support we're providing our allies in the Gulf in dealing with some very big problems, and around the world the extraordinary commitments that our Armed Services have to make in order to keep us safe.

On the domestic side, I've already said that we're not going to accept sequester-level budgets that result in effective cuts to critical programs like education that are imperative for our long-term growth.

So my hope is, is that, although I wish Congress well during the next 6 weeks—they probably deserve some time with their families to refuel a little bit—that some of these next 6 weeks are prepared to come up with a plan and approach whereby Democrats and Republicans sit down and negotiate a budget that works for everybody, and that everybody comes back with a spirit of compromise and a spirit of how do we make sure that our defense budget and our

domestic budget is reflective of the core needs that are going to improve prospects for people's lives not just this year, but for years to come.

I also hope that we can go ahead and get Export-Import Bank done, because that's going to be critical for our exports and for jobs here in the United States. And I hope that we have a longer term approach to transportation. We can't keep on funding transportation by the seat of our pants, 3 months at a time. It's just not how the greatest country on Earth should be doing its business.

I guarantee you this is not how China, Germany, other countries around the world—other big, powerful countries around the world—handle their infrastructure. And we can't have bridges collapsing and potholes not being filled because Congress can't come up with a adequate plan to fund our infrastructure budget for more than 3 or 5 or 6 months at a time. Okay?

With that, I'm going to sign this. And I hope that Members of Congress are listening, and I hope that Republicans can work things out among themselves as well as work out things with Democrats. I think we've got to do some intraparty negotiations as well as negotiations between the parties.

[*At this point, the President signed the bill.*]

There you go. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:35 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization. H.R. 3236, approved July 31, was assigned Public Law No. 114–41.

Categories: Bill Signings and Vetoes : Surface Transportation and Veterans Health Care Choice Improvement Act of 2015, signing remarks.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; Commerce, international : U.S. exports :: Expansion; Congress : Bipartisanship; Defense, Department of : Funding; Ethiopia : Trade with U.S.; Export-Import Bank of the U.S.; Iraq : Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization; Legislation, enacted : Surface Transportation and Veterans Health Care Choice Improvement Act of 2015; Syria : Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization; Transportation : Highway system, modernization efforts; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD201500543.