

Remarks on the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

January 14, 2022

Well, thank you very much, Mitch.

It is—there's a lot of talk about disappointments and things we haven't gotten done. We're going to get a lot of them done, I might add. But this is something we did get done, and it's of enormous consequence to the country.

One of the reasons I put Mitch Landrieu in charge of implementing the infrastructure bill is because he gets it. He's a former mayor who knows that the real measure of success is not: Did we score some partisan points? It's: Did we fix the problem? Did we fix the problem?

This is all about fixing the problem. I ran for President to unite the country. This bipartisan infrastructure law I signed 2 months ago unites us around things we all depend on. Whether you're in rural Kentucky or downtown Philadelphia, you should be able to turn on a faucet and drink clean water. Students should be able to get the internet if they need it to do their homework at home, instead of having to drive to a park—fast-food parking lot.

People need good jobs. Mitch has told me about the man he met in Jackson, Mississippi, who told him, quote: "I don't mind working three jobs. I just don't want one paycheck across all three jobs." You know, we've heard it said, "Talent is equally distributed, but opportunity is not." When we invest in infrastructure, we're really investing in opportunity. These are investments that will build a better America. Sounds like hyperbole, but it's real.

So today I want to talk about the progress we've made in 2 months since I signed the bill into law and to make a big announcement as well.

Here's some of what we've done so far: The Department of Transportation has released nearly \$53 billion—billion dollars—to States to modernize highways. So you have to leave 30 minutes earlier to get to work just because of a traffic jam? That's going to be fixed. We've announced more than \$240 million in grants to improve ports in 19 States to speed up and strengthen our supply chains, lower cost, and get you the things you need more quickly. We've announced \$3 billion for over 3,000 airports around the country to make them more modern, safe, and sustainable. And we're kicking off the largest investment in affordable, reliable, high-speed internet in our Nation's history: \$65 billion to get to every corner of our country connected: urban, rural, and suburban. Our infrastructure work also protects health, cleans up the environment, and helps us fight climate change.

Across this country, people have been struck, and they—and they've been struck by all of the changes that are needed. They're stuck. They're angry. They're sickened by the broken water and sewer systems: polluted water from the faucets, raw sewage in their backyards. I want you to know: I see you, I hear you. We understand. And I've seen and we've—understand the damage done in places like Flint, Michigan, and Jackson, Mississippi.

So we've already announced over \$7 billion in clean-water funding to States so they can fix and upgrade their aging water systems and sewer systems. It's going to take some time, but the money is there, and they're getting the money. Our children deserve no less.

We've also released an action plan to replace all of our Nation's lead pipes in the next decade. This is the United States of America, for God's sake. Everyone in this country should be able to turn on the faucet and drink clean water.

And it's time to get back to the business of cleaning up the hazardous waste sites that poison our land and water and have stricken entire communities and getting back to holding polluters accountable to keep that pollution from happening in the first place.

The Environmental Protection Agency has announced \$1 billion to clean up 49 Superfund sites in 24 States. We're talking about cleaning up rivers in Ohio, chemical plants and sites in Florida, polluted lakes in Michigan, and many more. This is long overdue, and we have to stick with it.

The Department of the Interior is launching a program to cap and plug orphaned oil and gas wells that are spewing methane into the air and are dangerous. Many of these wells are in southwestern Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, but there are hundreds of thousands of them all across the Nation. Capping them is going to create quality jobs. Just as it took to dig the well, union jobs—union jobs to close the well to keep it safe.

One of the ways we're going to reach my goal of a hundred-percent carbon pollution-free electricity by 2035 is with wind energy. I visited one of the renewable energy labs in Colorado about a month ago and saw technologies being developed there. And just this week, the Department of Interior also announced the largest ever offshore wind lease sale, which could generate enough clean energy to power nearly 2 million homes and create thousands of jobs in manufacturing, construction, operations, and maintenance. It's just the beginning. Jobs that can't be outsourced.

We've also seen the impact of extreme weather: taking down transmission lines, leaving cities and communities dark for weeks. So the Department of Energy launched a new initiative to speed up our efforts to strengthen our energy grid with new and upgraded transmission lines and towers, keeping the power flowing for Americans with cleaner, cheaper, and more reliable energy. And that's going to happen; it's going to make a big difference.

I also want to be clear: We are in this to win. And you know, there is a lot of work underway. And it's going to create a whole lot of jobs.

And that brings me to the announcement I want to make today that's just part of the infrastructure bill. My bipartisan infrastructure law includes the largest investment in our Nation's bridges since the creation of the Interstate Highway System: bridges to connect us; bridges to make America work.

Across our country right now, there are 45,000 bridges—45,000—that are in poor condition. We're seeing photos of some of them behind me in all 50 States. And I've had a chance to see some of them myself as I've traveled the country.

I was up in New Hampshire, visited a bridge where, if it's not upgraded, weight restrictions could mean that school buses and fire trucks would have to travel an additional 10 miles out of their way to get to the other side of the river to deal with getting to school and/or putting out a fire.

In New Jersey, I just visited the busiest rail bridge in the Western Hemisphere. But because it's not tall enough for ship traffic, it needs to swing open to let barges through. And sometimes, when it closes, the rails need to be manually sledge-hammered back into place. This slows commerce, increase costs.

I went down to Louisiana and saw the I-10 bridge. I stood with the mayor and looked at that bridge. It's 20 years past its planned life, it's handling more than double the number of crossings it was designed to handle, and it's two lanes narrower than the interstate that feeds into it, causing backups and accidents.

Today the Secretary of Transportation, Pete Buttigieg, is in Philadelphia at the Martin Luther King bridge, which crosses the Schuylkill River. The bridge is no longer safe for vehicles, even though it used to carry 25,000 vehicles a day.

As we prepare to celebrate Dr. King's birthday, we're also reminded that too often bridges and highways were built through the heart of historic communities, particularly Black communities, cutting off families, churches, and businesses. We're going to use our infrastructure investments to reconnect communities.

One thing I'm certain of: Everyone out there knows what I'm talking about. People have written to me about bridges they depend on. One man told me that the bridge he traveled on every day is "a tragedy waiting to happen." One woman wrote that the bridge near the center of her town had to be closed, and now she drives—and now drivers and tourists bypass downtown, consequently devastating local businesses. And one person wrote to me to say, quote, "This is your chance to show the people [in my area] that they matter" to you, end of quote. I hear you. I hear you. You do matter to me. And we are going to get it done.

My infrastructure law includes a total of \$40 billion in funding for bridge improvements. \$12.5 billion of that is going to replace most—the most economically significant bridges in the country. These are bridges like—and I've seen them—the Brent Spence Bridge connecting Ohio and Kentucky; the I-5 Columbia River Crossing connecting Washington and Oregon; you know, the Blatnik Bridge connecting Minnesota and Wisconsin.

But about two-thirds of the bridges in need of repair in this country are considered what they call "off system" because they're not directly connected to the Interstate Highway System. These are the bridges that are often overlooked when decisions are being made. But they are essential for small towns, rural towns, farmers to get their products to market, small businesses to be able to serve customers.

These are the bridges that, when they're closed, shut off deliveries and routes to school, work, and home. They create longer delays for first responders when every second counts.

So we've included \$27.5 billion for smaller bridges, including dedicated funding for those "off system" bridges I just described. And because maintaining these bridges is often the responsibility of counties or towns whose budgets are stretched thin already, we decided to get rid of the requirement that counties or towns share in the cost. The Federal Government is going to pay for 100 percent of the cost for repairing these small bridges.

Today we're releasing the first year of that program, which is \$5.5 billion: \$5½ billion to States and Tribes to repair and rebuild bridges to make them safer and more usable. This is an investment that's going to help connect entire towns and regions to new opportunities.

With this investment, we're sending a message to those communities and to the people who call them home: You matter. We're building back, and building back better with you. We're making sure you're not left behind or left out.

I'll end with this: These investments are consequential, and we're just getting started. We're building back better than ever before.

Clean water for every American. We're—never done that before. Now we're going to do it. High-speed internet for every American. We've never done that before. Now we are.

Connecting forgotten communities, capping wells that are dangerous, strengthening our power grid to make it more resilient to extreme weather changes: These are investments our country has never fully made. Now we are.

You know, and we've arrived at this by a bipartisan agreement. There's nothing beyond our capacity when we work together. When we get this done, we'll get back to beating the world again. We've [We'll]* once again be number one in the world, instead of where we sit now at number 13, in terms of the quality of our infrastructure. And that's going to mean more jobs, good-paying jobs, safer communities, and lower costs.

We can do this. This is what America—a better America is going to look like.

I want to thank you all for listening. And we've got a lot of work to do.

And the reason I asked Mitch to do this is because he knows how to get things done. I want every penny watched—how this is spent, just like when I did the Recovery Act in our—the last administration. It matters. It matters.

So thank you all very much. Appreciate it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:06 p.m. in the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Senior Adviser and Infrastructure Act Implementation Coordinator Mitchell J. Landrieu, who introduced the President; and Mayor Randy Roach of Lake Charles, LA.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Buttigieg, Peter P.M.; Landrieu, Mitchell J.; Roach, Randy.

Subjects: Commerce, international : Global supply chain disruptions, efforts to address; Communications : Broadband and wireless technologies; Congress : Bipartisanship; Economy, national : Household income and wages; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Infrastructure and grid improvements; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Environment : Air quality, improvement efforts; Environment : Carbon emissions, reduction efforts; Environment : Lead service lines, replacement efforts; Environment : Quality and improvement efforts; Government organization and employees : Accountability and transparency, strengthening efforts; Holidays and special observances : Martin Luther King Day; Infrastructure, national improvement efforts; Labor issues : Unions :: Labor movement and organized labor; Science and technology : Research and development; Transportation : Bridge infrastructure, improvement efforts; Transportation : Highway system, modernization efforts; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; Transportation, Department of : Secretary; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Senior Adviser and Infrastructure Coordinator.

DCPD Number: DCPD202200017.

* White House correction.