

## 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 an 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.

## The President's Weekly Address

August 1, 2015

Hi, everybody. This week, there was a big birthday you might have missed. Medicare and Medicaid turned 50 years old. And that's something worth celebrating.

If one of the best measures of a country is how it treats its more vulnerable citizens—seniors, the poor, the sick—then America has a lot to be proud of. Think about it. Before Social Security, too many seniors lived in poverty. Before Medicare, only half had some form of health insurance. Before Medicaid, parents often had no help covering the costs of care for a child with a disability.

But as Americans, we declared that our citizens deserve a basic measure of security and dignity. And today, the poverty rate for seniors is less than half of what it was 50 years ago. Every American over 65 has access to affordable health care. And today, we're finally finishing the job. Since I signed the Affordable Care Act into law, the uninsured rate for all Americans has fallen by about one-third.

These promises we made as a nation have saved millions of our own people from poverty and hardship, allowing us new freedom, new independence, and the chance to live longer, better lives. That's something to be proud of. It's heroic. These endeavors—these American endeavors—they didn't just make us a better country. They reaffirmed that we are a great country.

And a great country keeps the promises it makes. Today, we're often told that Medicare and Medicaid are in crisis, but that's usually a political excuse to cut their funding, privatize them, or phase them out entirely, all of which would undermine their core guarantee. The truth is, these programs aren't in crisis. Nor have they kept us from cutting our deficits by two-thirds since I took office. What is true is that every month, another 250,000 Americans turn 65 years old, and become eligible for Medicare. And we all deserve a health care system that delivers efficient, high-quality care. So to keep these programs strong, we'll have to make smart changes over time, just like we always have.

Today, we're actually proving that's possible. The Affordable Care Act has already helped secure Medicare's funding for another 13 years. The Affordable Care Act has saved more than 9 million folks on Medicare 15 billion dollars on their prescription drugs. It's expanded Medicaid to help cover 12.8 million more Americans and to help more seniors live independently. And we're moving our health care system toward models that reward the quality of the care you receive, not the quantity of care you receive. That means healthier Americans and a healthier Federal budget.

Today, these programs are so fundamental to our way of life that it's easy to forget how hard people fought against them at the time.