

want to get done this summer, in the building season, but if they do not know until July what the funding is going to be, he said, I have to drop a lot of those projects off the bottom. When I do that, that is a lot of jobs. It is unnecessary. We could be passing this bipartisan Senate bill through the House very quickly. Democrats would vote for it. Many Republicans would vote for it. All those jobs would be able to start up right away. If we extend it further into September, that makes it even worse. So it is urgent that we not continue down a path of delay and delay of the bill.

It is not only me saying this. The folks at Standard & Poor's have come out with a report that is entitled "Increasingly Unpredictable Federal Funding Could Stall U.S. Transportation Infrastructure Projects." They point out that:

As the construction season begins in the northern half of the country, this continuing uncertainty in funding could force states to delay projects rather than risk funding changes or political gridlock come July.

That is exactly what Director Lewis told me, that simply the uncertainty will move jobs off the list that can be done in this construction season. The report continues that "... the political gridlock in Washington, DC"—i.e. the Speaker being unwilling to call up a bipartisan, 75 to 22, Senate bill with Democratic and Republican amendments, everybody supporting it, unwilling to call that up because he doesn't want to have to rely on Democratic votes, that is political gridlock for sure—"and the doubts surrounding federal funding are making it difficult for issuers throughout the infrastructure sector to define long-term plans for funding necessary capital projects."

Then this report goes on to say:

Once a long-term authorization is approved, we believe it will provide an impetus for transportation agencies to reconsider high priority projects that have been shelved because of lack of funds, but if the authorization is extended by even more continuing resolutions, such high priority projects will remain in limbo.

Jobs are at stake. It is a multi-million-jobs bill. It is sitting over there, not because of any problem they have with the bill per se. They don't have a bill of their own. They don't have anything they prefer. I hear they are going to send over another extension to September—arguably, if I hear correctly, with some politically very contentious issues attached, which makes it even more difficult. Remember, this was a bipartisan bill here on the Senate side. That is where we are stuck.

So I wished to take the time this evening to urge my colleagues on the Republican side of the aisle to use whatever powers they have of conversation or persuasion to get the House to call up the bill. If we have to get this bill over, the alternative is, if it is only another extension, that is going to cost—I don't know—another 1,000 jobs in Rhode Island. We need to

make sure we have a bill that will take us to conference and that we get to conference as quickly as possible. Once we are in conference, we need to pass a real authorization that avoids these problems as quickly as possible. The American people expect no less.

It is not rocket science to pass a transportation bill. Congress has been doing this since the days when President Eisenhower established the Federal highway program. If we cannot get this done, what does that say about our prospects of doing something complicated, such as cybersecurity or other issues we will have to face? This should be a slam dunk, particularly with a bipartisan bill that everybody supports that came through the Senate after such a clear, transparent, rigorous, and open process. I will end my remarks there.

ARTS ADVOCACY DAY 2012

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, at a recent HELP Committee hearing on education and the economy, representatives of the business community told us that it is not enough for our education system to produce graduates who can read, write, and do math. Employers need workers who can apply creativity, collaboration, and communication in their jobs to solve problems, produce ideas and make connections. These are the keys to innovation and success in the knowledge economy of the 21st century. Indeed, they are essential if we are to move our economy forward, create jobs, and ensure our national security. But I ask you, How can we produce graduates who are creative and collaborative if we don't value the arts in our society and teach it in our schools?

Today is Arts Advocacy Day. Advocates for the arts have come to Washington to remind their elected officials about the importance of Federal investments in the arts. Why investment at the Federal level? Because arts are essential to the fabric of our society. Arts education teaches critical skills—not just creativity, but also a rigorous and practical application of other skills. The arts make us think. The arts improve our quality of life. The arts provide an outlet for personal and political expression. Collectively, our arts express who we are as a nation. This very building, the United States Capitol, an enduring symbol of freedom and democracy, is an especially powerful example. Federal funds built this building. Federal funds also support vital programs such as the Iowa Arts Council Big Yellow School Bus grants, to pay the costs of busing students to museums or live orchestra concerts. For many students, this is the only opportunity they have to experience the arts.

It is imperative that we continue to promote a society where all citizens are exposed to the arts and where all students—no matter their socioeconomic background, community, family, or ability—have equitable access to a high-quality, public, well-

rounded education that includes the arts.

Unfortunately, recent data from the Department of Education show that inequities persist. Schools serving the poorest students are less likely to offer instruction in the arts. For example, availability of music instruction in secondary schools on average has remained at about 90 percent for the last 10 years. Meanwhile, it has actually decreased, from 100 percent to 81 percent for schools with the highest poverty concentration—a 19 percentage point decrease.

We all want our kids to succeed in school, and to be inspired in school. Many students find the motivation to learn through participation in the visual arts, drama, band, orchestra, choir, or dance. Every child should have the opportunity to do something that inspires and excites them, that teaches them creativity, collaboration, and communication, no matter their socioeconomic status, their neighborhood, their local tax base. Research has shown that arts education improves not only children's creativity, but also their ability to learn and be productive in school, as well as their self-confidence and social skills.

Christine Dunn, a music teacher at Harlan Community Elementary School in Harlan, IA, wrote me a letter urging me to continue my support for the arts. She told me that without the arts, "our students may never be able to see, understand or express feelings, thoughts and ideas fully. I try to imagine a world without the arts and it looks very bleak. The arts give us creativity and the freedom to be ourselves."

Today on the occasion of Arts Advocacy Day, I would like to recognize the outstanding advocacy of Iowans like Ms. Dunn, Barry Griswell, and Suku Radia—and the wonderful contributions that Iowans have made to the arts throughout our nation's history.

TRIBUTE TO MASTER SERGEANT CHARLES ROBERT 'BOB' STOKES

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to a distinguished veteran of our Nation's great Armed Forces, Master Sergeant Charles Robert "Bob" Stokes of East Bernstadt, KY. MSG Stokes enlisted in the United States Air Force on June 6, 1955. He had just graduated from London High School the week before; he was 18 years old.

There was a wide variety of disciplines Bob could have entered within the Air Force. He prayed all throughout his basic training for God to put him in the field he would be best suited to. Being the son of a mechanic, he possessed natural tendencies to fix things, and had worked on machinery previously in his life. So after much praying, Bob was assigned to be an aircraft mechanic, an act he later would refer to as a "divine intervention."

Stokes had never traveled much before the service, but he soon found himself stationed all around the country at Air Force bases in Missouri, Arkansas, and Puerto Rico, to name a few. Stokes eventually landed a spot on the presidential squadron put in charge of the famous presidential aircraft, Air Force One. He was part of that outfit throughout the administrations of Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Gerald Ford.

Stokes's career in the Air Force continued to prove fortuitous. He saw the world through the window of Air Force One, visiting places that he had dreamed of seeing his entire life. He witnessed monumental historic events, like Nixon's resignation, from an arm's length away. He executed his job superbly, ensuring the President would always arrive safely on the ground. And finally, Bob received the greatest benefit he would ever come across while running the presidential squadron, meeting his wife Varlene. She too was serving on Andrews AFB at the time.

Bob and Varlene retired to East Bernstadt in 1976, where they reside to this day. The two have three children—Robert Jr., Tricia, and Ward, all of whom appreciate the dedication their mother and father have shown to our great Nation throughout the years.

Mr. President, in November 2011 there was an article published in Laurel County, Kentucky's local periodical magazine, the *Sentinel Echo*: Silver Edition. The article noted the accomplishments of Mr. Stokes throughout his many years of service in the United States Air Force.

At this time, Mr. President, it is my wish that my colleagues in the United States Senate join me in honoring Master Sergeant Charles Robert Stokes for his dedication to our great country; and I ask unanimous consent that said article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the article was ordered to appear in the RECORD as follows:

[From the *Sentinel Echo*: Silver Edition,
Nov. 2011]

HISTORY IN THE MAKING (By Carrie Dillard)

When retired Master Sergeant Charles Robert "Bob" Stokes was in basic training at Sampson Air Force Base, N.Y., waiting to speak to a counselor about which career field he would be best suited for, he prayed.

Having enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, Stokes knew he couldn't be a cook—he can't cook, he said, but he likes to eat. He didn't want to be an air policeman either. But he had a mechanical background, came by it honest from his father. "It was in my blood," he said.

So when only two men in his class were assigned to be in aircraft mechanics, Stokes called it divine intervention—a guiding hand that led him into the company of presidents, and ultimately to meet his wife.

Stokes graduated from London High School on May 28, 1955. He went into the service on June 6.

"I didn't have a summer vacation that year," he said. But he would get to see and experience many places in the United States

and around the world that he had never dreamed of visiting.

For a small town boy from Laurel County, New York was quite a culture shock.

"How green I was," he said. "I'd never even seen a pizza in my life, never tasted one until I went to New York. It looked terrible."

But Stokes changed his mind about the pizza, and adapted to his new surroundings, albeit with a lot of homesickness. He completed aircraft and engine school in Amarillo, Texas, and was then stationed at Whiteman Air Force Base, Mo.

"I was a homesick boy," Stokes said. "I don't think I'd been any place other than Ohio and Tennessee before that, besides Kentucky."

At 18 years old, he was the youngest crew chief, or "glorified mechanic," at Whiteman AFB, maintaining B-47s. He'd later be stationed in Arkansas, Puerto Rico, and back to Missouri again, where he received orders to deploy to Guam.

Stokes was aboard B-52s, flying combat missions over Vietnam. As a crew chief, Stokes would fly beside the pilot.

"I supposed it made the pilot feel better knowing there was someone beside him who knew how to fix the plane," he said.

As the person who made sure the craft was "airworthy" by keeping it properly maintained and fueled up, it was rare for Stokes not to feel confident in an airplane. He said there was only one time when he felt like he might perish in one. It was during his time at Andrews Air Force Base.

Stokes was stationed at Andrews AFB during the administrations of Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Gerald Ford. He saw the world through the window of Air Force One, as a crew chief on the presidential squadron.

The presidential outfit was made up of 30 to 40 planes to be used by anyone from the president or vice president to cabinet officials. There were smaller jets used to shuttle dignitaries between Andrews AFB and Camp David, and Marine helicopters to fly the president back and forth between the White House and Andrews. Stokes was assigned to a VC-135, a plush plane strictly for VIP travel.

As a man who loves to study history, the 74-year-old realizes now, more than ever, that he had a "window" into American and world history.

"I saw history," he said. "The poor people's march on Washington, riots of the 1960s, Watergate."

He remembers the day Nixon returned from a diplomatic trip to China. It was the first time a U.S. president had visited the People's Republic of China, strongly considered an adversary at the time.

"It [the trip] was very hush-hush," said Stokes. "But when he came back, they let all the Air Force personnel and their families know about it. We gathered around the hangar as he taxied into the hangar."

He also remembers the day Nixon resigned. Actually, he saw him leave.

"When Nixon left, he got on a plane to California," Stokes said. "We liked Nixon. But he got involved in that Watergate."

On the flight where he thought he might perish, the presidential squadron had flown a delegation to a state funeral in Brazil. While it was standard to fly with enough fuel to make a landing at nearby alternate locations, the plane was nearly to their destination when they discovered the airport had closed. Low visibility and haze kept the plane from landing in Brazil, and they burned up most of the fuel circling the runway.

"I was sweating bullets. It was the closest I've ever come to losing my life in an aircraft."

Truth be told, Stokes didn't want to go to Andrews AFB in 1967 when he was selected.

"I tried to get out of it, Stokes said. "I was on B-52s, in combat, making combat pay, I was staff sergeant. I was living pretty good."

Andrews AFB had the safest flight record and highest standard of excellence in maintenance. "If you were selected, you were the cream of the crop. You had to be good or you wouldn't last," Stokes said.

But at the time, he didn't know what Andrews was all about; he didn't even know what he'd been selected for.

Upon arrival at Andrews AFB, SSG Stokes was escorted into the hangar bay by a master sergeant. Another master sergeant, at the time, was taking out the trash.

"I thought it was unusual to see a master sergeant doing this type of work, and what are they going to be having me, the staff sergeant, doing, scrubbing toilets," he said.

"But that's just the way it was. The master sergeant (escorting me) told me 'every man on crew takes a turn at hangar detail.'" And they did.

"We'd sweep and mop that hangar floor. You could eat off it. I'd wax and polish the airplanes. Nobody was scared to work."

Besides, it had to be perfect. It was the home of the Air Force One, and Stokes had just made presidential squadron.

"When we were overseas, nobody would touch that airplane but me," Stokes said. "I'd check the oil, pre-flight and post-flight and put it to bed."

Upon landing anywhere in the world, Stokes would service the plane, fuel it up and make sure it was ready to go for the return trip. He was the last person to see and touch the plane before guards were stationed around the plane—inside the hangar and outside the hangar. No other soul was getting near it.

It's why one night when Stokes got a call that he needed to check the plane due to a bomb threat, he said "no way." He was confident how he'd left the plane.

"I said no way," he said. "But we had to inspect it. I went over it from top to bottom, couldn't find anything."

But tensions were high then. Not long after the alleged bomb threat, they heard word there'd been an attack on the Vice President's (Spiro Agnew) motorcade in Dallas, Texas. However, it wasn't a sniper, but heat, that had made the back window shatter on the car.

Stokes met his wife, Varlene, while serving at Andrews AFB. She was working for the Department of Agriculture at the time. The two met at a cookout hosted by a mutual friend.

Although Stokes claimed he was a "confirmed bachelor" at the age of 31, he said Varlene "changed his mind." They were married in October 1968.

"The best thing that ever happened to me was meeting her," he said.

The couple raised three children—Robert Jr., Tricia, and Ward. After every trip, Stokes would bring home a boon for his young family. A spoon for Bobby, a doll for Tricia, and foreign coins for his wife, Varlene, although he wasn't actually supposed to keep the coins. "We were supposed to turn them in before we left the country," he said. The Stokes's third child, Ward, wouldn't come along until after he left Andrews AFB, missing out on the collections.

The couple retired to East Bernstadt in 1976, where they still live today.

"The more you look back on it, I'm just blessed," Stokes said.

TRIBUTE TO MR. MARTIN YOUNG

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today in honor of a devoted and loyal serviceman from the United