

Congressional Record

COMMEMORATING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INTERSTATE SYSTEM (Senate - April 05, 2006)

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Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, as Chairman and on behalf of my colleagues on the Environment and Public Works Committee, I urge support of this resolution to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate System. The Committee as a whole would like to mark the momentous achievements made over the last 50 years that have provided for revolutionary advances in our nation's vital infrastructure. It is essential that Congress, just as it did in 1956, recognize the importance of continued investment in our nation's highways and the undeniable link between a robust economy and a vibrant national infrastructure.

Because of my work on SAFETEA-LU (Public Law 109-59) I have a better appreciation of just how visionary the authors of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 were when they laid out a network of interstate highways and devised a stable and reliable funding stream to pay for it. I am certain that at the time there were those who felt the plan was too ambitious, too expensive and consequently not a good use of scarce Federal dollars. I am sure all would agree that not only was it a good use of scarce Federal dollars, but that the nation has enjoyed a many-fold return on the expenditure.

Laying out the full interstate system--rather than a piecemeal of road segments--along with providing a dedicated funding source expedited construction and provided certainty. This certainty maximized the economic and mobility benefits of the system. Businesses and individuals knew that they could locate somewhere on the future interstate system and be connected to rest of the country.

The second essential element of the success of the highway program over the last 50 years has been the dependable funding stream for the interstate. In the absence of this dedicated funding source, it is my firm belief that investment in our nation's highways and bridges would be far less than has been the case. Without the relative certainty of funding and knowledge of the interstate's general location, the impacts on productivity and economic growth would have been dramatically less than we experienced.

The connectivity and mobility provided for both freight and people by our interstate system is unrivaled: and I believe was more than just a small part of the economic success enjoyed by the U.S. over the past 50 years. It is essential that we continue to make the necessary investment to fight congestion and maintain the mobility necessary to keep the economy growing.

I have always said that the federal government has two main functions: national defense and to provide infrastructure. Since one of the earliest justifications for the interstate system was to provide for national defense, the highway program is actually a perfect merger of the 2 most important functions of government.

For the last 50 years the gas tax has been deposited into the trust fund and used to construct and maintain our roads. In the past, the gas tax has been a reasonably good proxy for road use; and the trust fund has in recent history had sufficient receipts to fund the highway program. This is changing with the increase in fuel efficiency, highlighted by fuel-cell vehicles coming just over the horizon, and improved technology allows for improvements in how to collect the user fee. It is important to look forward to how we fund the highway program in the future because when the next highway bill is drafted, there will be no cushion of a cash balance left in the trust fund.

The current challenges facing the highway trust fund--and hence the highway program--will be very difficult to resolve and not unlike the challenges faced by the authors of the 1956 act. It will be up to policymakers to be as visionary as they were 50 years ago. A new vision is needed in what the highway program will stand for in the next 50 years and how to pay for it.

The resolution (S. Res. 427) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

The resolution, with its preamble, reads as follows:

S. Res. 427

Whereas, on June 29, 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed into law--

(1) the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 (Public Law 84-627; 70 Stat. 374) to establish the 41,000-mile National System of Interstate and Defense Highways, later designated as the "Dwight D. Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways"; and

(2) the Highway Revenue Act of 1956 (Public Law 84-627; 70 Stat. 387) to create the Highway Trust Fund;

Whereas, in 1990, the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways was renamed the Dwight D. Eisenhower System of Interstate and Defense Highways to recognize the role of President Eisenhower in the creation of the Interstate Highway System;

Whereas that web of superhighways, now spanning a total of 46,876 miles throughout the United States, has had a powerful and positive impact on the lives of United States citizens;

Whereas the Interstate System has proven to be a vital tool for transporting people and goods from 1 region to another speedily and safely;

Whereas the use of the Interstate System has helped the Nation facilitate domestic and global trade, and has allowed the Nation to create unprecedented economic expansion and opportunities for millions of United States citizens;

Whereas the Interstate System has enabled diverse communities throughout the United States to come closer together, and has allowed United States citizens to remain connected to each other as well as to the larger world;

Whereas the Interstate System has made it easier and more enjoyable for United States citizens to travel to long-distance destinations and spend time with family members and friends who live far away;

Whereas the Interstate System is a pivotal link in the national chain of defense and emergency preparedness efforts;

Whereas the Interstate System remains 1 of the paramount assets of the United States, as well as a symbol of human ingenuity and freedom;

Whereas the anniversary of the Interstate System provides United States citizens with an occasion to honor 1 of the largest public works achievements of all time, and reflect on how the Nation can maintain the effectiveness of the System in the years ahead: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved that the Senate

(1) proclaims 2006 as the Golden Anniversary Year of the Dwight D. Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways;

(2) recognizes and celebrates the achievements of the Federal Highway Administration, State departments of transportation, and the highway construction industry of the United States, including contractors, designers, engineers, labor, materials producers, and equipment companies, for their contributions to the quality of life of the citizens of the United States; and

(3) encourages citizens, communities, governmental agencies, and other organizations to promote and participate in celebratory and educational activities that mark this uniquely important and historic milestone.