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Obama to Congress: Pass highway, student loan bills

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By David Jackson, USA TODAY

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Weekly Address: Congress Must Act [Share] [More info]



President Obama warned Saturday that construction jobs will dry up and college students will face higher costs if Congress does not act next week.

"There's no excuse for inaction," Obama said in his weekly radio address, calling for Congress to pass extensions of highway and student loan programs; both are due to expire soon.

"Right now, we are seven days away from thousands of American workers having to walk off the job because Congress hasn't passed a transportation bill," Obama said.

The president added: "We are eight days away from nearly seven-and-a-half million students seeing their loan rates double because Congress hasn't acted to stop it."



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About David Jackson

David's journalism career spans three decades, including coverage of five presidential elections, the Oklahoma City bombing, the 2000 Florida presidential recount and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He has covered the White House for USA TODAY since 2005. His interests include history, politics, books, movies and college football -- not necessarily in that order. [More about David](#)



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Locked in what looks like a tight re-election race with Republican Mitt Romney, Obama has often protested what he calls GOP obstructionism in Congress.

Both the highway bill and an extension of a low-interest rate student loan program are the subjects of intense negotiations on Capitol Hill.

The president's radio address:

Over the past three years, we've been clawing our way back from the worst economic crisis of our lifetimes. And we know it will take longer than any of us would like to fully recover all the jobs and savings that have been lost. But there are things we can do -- right now -- to help put people back to work and make life a little easier for middle-class families.



CAPTION By Carolyn Kaster, AP

For months, I've been pushing Congress to help us along by passing common-sense policies that would make a difference. Democrats and Republicans have already done some important work together -- like passing a tax cut that's allowing working Americans to keep more of their paycheck every week. But Congress has refused to act on most of the other ideas in my jobs plan that economists say could put a million more Americans back to work.

There's no excuse for inaction. Right now, we are seven days away from thousands of American workers having to walk off the job because Congress hasn't passed a transportation bill. We are eight days away from nearly seven and a half million students seeing their loan rates double because Congress hasn't acted to stop it.

This makes no sense. We know that one of the most important things we can do for our economy is to make sure that all Americans get the best education possible. Right now, the unemployment rate for Americans with a college degree or more is about half the national average. Their incomes are twice as high as those who don't have a high school diploma. So, if we know that a higher education is the clearest path to the middle class, why would we make it harder to achieve?

So much of America needs to be repaired right now. Bridges are deteriorating after years of neglect. Highways are choked with congestion. Transportation delays cost Americans and businesses billions of dollars every year. And there are hundreds of thousands of construction workers who have never been more eager to get back on the job. So why would we let our transportation funding run out? This is a time when we should be doing everything in our power -- Democrats and Republicans -- to keep this recovery moving forward.

My Administration is doing its part. On Friday, Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood announced \$500 million in competitive grants for states and communities that will create construction jobs on projects like road repair and port renovation. And that's an important step, but we can't do it all on our own.

The Senate did their part. They passed a bipartisan transportation bill back in March. It had the support of 52 Democrats and 22 Republicans.

Now, it's up to the House to follow suit; to put aside partisan posturing, end the gridlock, and do what's right for the American people.

It's not lost on any of us that this is an election year. But we've got responsibilities that are bigger than an election. We answer to the American people, and they are demanding action. Let's make it easier for students to stay in college.

[Mitt Romney Official Site](#)

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Let's keep construction workers rebuilding our roads and bridges. And let's tell Congress to do their job. Tell them it's time to take steps that we know will create jobs now and help sustain our economy for years to come.

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