



## Highway bill conferees given new instructions in House vote

By Pete Kasperowicz - 06/06/12 06:38 PM ET

The House passed a motion on Wednesday that instructs House conferees to the highway bill that they should accept language guaranteeing that each state receives more guaranteed highway money from the federal government.

Members approved a motion to instruct from Rep. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) by a 259-154 vote.

Flake's motion tells House negotiators to accept Senate language that says every state will get at least 95 percent of the gas tax money that they contribute to the federal highway fund. The current minimum is 92 percent.

Flake said it's time to change the current situation in which some states routinely contribute more than they receive.

"It's been the history of disparity by which a number of states have received less back in funding that they have invested in the highway trust fund through the gas tax," Flake said on the floor.

Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) argued against it by saying the motion makes no sense, since every state receives far more money than it puts in.

"For several years, general fund revenue has been filling the gap between what the highway trust fund can support and current funding levels," Nadler said. "So now, every state gets back more from the program than the amount of gas taxes collected in that state. In effect, every state is a donee state."

But Flake said that argument is typical from members to come from states that get "more than a dollar for the dollar they kick in."

The House also voted on a motion to instruct from Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-Texas), which would have instructed conferees to support language in the Senate highway bill that seeks to raise \$1 billion by taking tougher actions against offshore tax havens. That motion, however, failed in a 192-226 vote.

"This effort is a distraction from the job at hand, which is to pass a transportation bill," Rep. Michael Grimm (R-N.Y.) argued during debate.

It's unclear whether these motions, or other ones approved in May, will have any outcome on the

highway bill talks. The Senate has approved its bill, which would authorize federal highway programs for two years and spend \$109 billion.

House Republicans have had a more difficult time getting support on their side for the legislation, and have only passed two short-term extensions. The GOP has said generally that it is harder and harder to pay for highway programs given the fiscal crisis the government faces.

Last week, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) hinted that the conference may not complete its work by June 30, when federal highway authorization expires, a sign that some short-term bill might yet be needed.

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