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Vote on Transportation Funding Shows How Far Conservative Republicans Have Come

By **Tom Curry**

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Lankford was one of the few who voted "no." (Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call File Photo)

You can draw two lessons draw from Tuesday's 367-55 **House vote** to authorize and fund transportation programs through May 2015.

One is that building off-ramps and overpasses is popular in an overwhelmingly bipartisan way, even if Congress can only manage to authorize and fund infrastructure in increments, in this case 10 months.

A second lesson is that when **Heritage Action** and the **Club for Growth** speak, Republicans listen. But in this case after listening to the conservative groups **call for them to reject the bill**, a mere 45 Republicans voted in line with Heritage Action and the Club for Growth.

Among the seven House Republicans who are running for a Senate seat and thus must face a statewide electorate in November, only one, Rep. James Lankford of Oklahoma, voted against the bill.

Rep. Jack Kingston of Georgia, who faces a Senate primary run-off election next Tuesday against businessman David Perdue – who has attacked Kingston for over-spending—didn't vote.

Of the 33 GOP members of the **Transportation and Infrastructure Committee**, only three – Rep. Reid Ribble of Wisconsin, Rep. Mark Meadows of North Carolina, and Rep. Mark Sanford of South Carolina – voted no.

CQ's David Harrison reported that Lankford was looking to the future Tuesday, saying "It's the

ABOUT THE CONTAINER

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long-term systemic reforms [of federal transportation programs] that are the next battle. How are we actually going to get real reforms in there, give states more decision-making opportunities and have the funding worked out long term?"

Heritage Action's spokesman Dan Holler explained before the vote that "the specter of a crisis, no matter how overstated, occasionally causes solid conservatives to cast votes based on factors other than the underlying policy. Fortunately, regardless of the outcome of today's vote, it is undeniable the appetite for real reform is growing within the House Republican Conference."

But it seems at this point that despite efforts by Lankford and others, the large federal role in highway and transit funding is a fact of life that most conservative Republicans accept. The idea of devolving federal money to the states got no more than lip service from House GOP leaders this week.

Contrast the 181 Republican 'ayes' on Tuesday with the vote on the forerunner of Tuesday's bill, the mass transit act of 1964, which began federal funding of transit systems and led to the creation of what we know today as the Department of Transportation — now more than 54,000 employees strong, the vast majority of them based in Washington.

On that vote, 50 years ago — the year conservatives took control of the Republican Party by nominating Barry Goldwater as their presidential candidate — more than two-thirds of House Republicans (128 out of 189) voted "no," seeing the bill as a federal overreach.

Less than one-fifth of House Republicans voted "no" on Tuesday.

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