



WH encouraged the House is 'about to do something' on highway funding

By Keith Laing - 07/15/14 03:26 PM EDT

The White House said Tuesday that it was encouraged that the Republican-led House was "about to do something" about federal transportation funding.

Obama has spoken at length in recent weeks about his belief that Congress would rather **sue** him than take actions to address national priorities like transportation funding as the president has sought to generate excitement among Democratic voters ahead of the upcoming midterm elections.

White House press secretary Josh Earnest said Tuesday that the White House's endorsement of the approximately \$10 billion GOP transportation bill did not undercut Obama's campaign message.

"They're about to do something, which I guess is...cause for if not celebration, at least for some optimism, which is pretty rare in Washington, too," Earnest said.

Earnest called a statement of administration support for a proposal from House Republicans to extend the Highway Trust Fund a "positive development."

"I think that is prima facie evidence that this president is willing to work across the aisle to get things done that benefits the economy and middle-class families," he added.

The legislation at issue is intended to prevent a **bankruptcy** in federal transportation spending predicted to occur next month unless Congress acts.

Budget analysts have projected that the Department of Transportation's Highway Trust Fund will run short by about \$16 billion per year without an additional infusion of cash or a drastic cutback in federal transportation spending.

The traditional source of funding for transportation projects has been the 18.4 cents-per-gallon gas tax. The tax has been stagnant since 1993, however, and it has struggled to keep pace with infrastructure expenses as cars have become more fuel efficient in recent years.

The gas tax brings in about \$34 billion per year, but the federal government currently spends approximately \$50 billion annually on road and transit projects. Transportation advocates have said that the current funding level is the minimum that can be spent to maintain the nation's infrastructure network.

Obama took Republicans to task in a **speech** in northern Virginia on Tuesday for ignoring his proposal for a four-year, **\$302 billion** transportation bill that would increase the annual road and transit funding level to about \$75 billion per year.

"All this does is set us up for the crisis a few months from now," Obama said. "Congress shouldn't pat itself on the back for averting disaster for a few months. Kicking the can down the road a few months...Instead of barely paying our bills in the present, we should be investing in our future."

Earnest said Tuesday that while Obama would sign the House-backed temporary transportation funding measure, he would have preferred debate on a longer spending package.

"We're certainly encouraged that even a short-term measure like the one that Congressman [Dave] Camp [R-Mich.] has put forward would avert, you know, the terrible economic consequences that come with the expiration of the Highway Trust Fund," Earnest said. "Now, what has not changed, however, as you heard the president articulate earlier today, is this administration's advocacy for a long-term renewal of the highway bill that a longer-term investment in infrastructure would provide some certainty to the market, something Republicans themselves say is an important economic virtue."

The House is scheduled to vote on its temporary transportation funding extension Tuesday afternoon. Debate on the measure on the floor of the lower chamber has already begun.

TAGS: Josh Earnest, Highway Trust Fund, Gas Tax, MAP-21 Reauthorization

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