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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
FACSIMILE (202) 225-3974
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
<http://oversight.house.gov>

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September 9, 2011

The Honorable Darrell E. Issa
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As one of my first actions as Ranking Member of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, I urged you to hold hearings on proposals to create jobs. Specifically, on February 10, 2011, I wrote a letter requesting that the Committee hold hearings on an initiative proposed by President Obama in his State of the Union address “to create jobs and strengthen the economy by investing in America’s infrastructure.”¹

As I highlighted in my letter in February, both the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the AFL-CIO endorsed the President’s proposal. In a rare joint statement, they said:

Whether it is building roads, bridges, high-speed broadband, energy systems and schools, these projects not only create jobs and demand for businesses, they are an investment in building the modern infrastructure our country needs to compete in a global economy.²

For these reasons, I asked you to invite the presidents of the Chamber and AFL-CIO, as well as Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, to testify about the President’s proposal. As I stated in February, “these are exactly the kinds of bipartisan, constructive initiatives our Committee and Congress should support.”³

¹ Letter from Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings to Chairman Darrell E. Issa (Feb. 10, 2011) (online at http://democrats.oversight.house.gov/images/stories/EEC_to_Issa_02-10-11_Hrg_Req_on_Infrastructure.pdf).

² *Donohue and Trumka Issue Joint Statement on SOTU*, U.S. Chamber of Commerce (Jan. 26, 2011) (online at www.aflcio.org/mediacenter/prsptm/pr01262011a.cfm).

³ Letter from Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings to Chairman Darrell E. Issa (Feb. 10, 2011).

Over the past seven months, however, you have decided not to honor my request, failed to hold hearings on this bipartisan proposal, and declined to invite these witnesses to testify. I believe this was a mistake and a missed opportunity for our Committee to play a constructive role in helping to create American jobs.

During his address to the nation last night, President Obama set forth a robust proposal to help create millions of jobs across the country through the American Jobs Act. A key part of this proposal focuses on infrastructure projects—projects that garnered widespread bipartisan support back in February and continue to do so today. He stated:

Pass this jobs bill, and we can put people to work rebuilding America. Everyone here knows that we have badly decaying roads and bridges all over this country. Our highways are clogged with traffic. Our skies are the most congested in the world.

This is inexcusable. Building a world-class transportation system is part of what made us an economic superpower. And now we're going to sit back and watch China build newer airports and faster railroads? At a time when millions of unemployed construction workers could build them right here in America? ...

The idea for a big boost in construction is supported by America's largest business organization and America's largest labor organization. It's the kind of proposal that's been supported in the past by Democrats and Republicans alike. You should pass it right away.⁴

The President's proposal offers our Committee a second chance to act constructively to help grow the American economy. I am writing today to request that the Committee hold a series of six hearings over the next two weeks focusing in detail on proposals in the American Jobs Act. I ask that this series begin with the hearing on infrastructure programs I requested seven months ago, including a review of bipartisan proposals to create jobs through rehabilitating homes, businesses, and communities; to invest in a National Infrastructure Bank; to modernize at least 35,000 schools; and to expand access to high-speed wireless.

I also request that the Committee hold five additional hearings on core components of the President's proposal, including:

- Helping American Families Avoid Foreclosure: This hearing would focus on proposals to help families avoid foreclosures, including by allowing them to refinance their mortgages at historically low rates, thereby helping homeowners, investors, and communities across the country.

⁴ President Barack Obama, *Address by the President to a Joint Session of Congress* (Sept. 8, 2011) (online at www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/08/address-president-joint-session-congress).

- Cutting Workers' Payroll Taxes: This hearing would focus on the proposal to expand the payroll tax cut passed last year to cut workers payroll taxes in half in 2012, providing a \$1,500 tax cut for typical American families.
- Helping the Unemployed Transition to the Workplace: This hearing would focus on proposals to extend unemployment insurance; allow long-term unemployed workers to receive unemployment insurance while they obtain work-based training; provide tax credits for companies that hire workers who have been looking for jobs for more than six months; and support summer and year-round jobs for youth, subsidized employment opportunities for low-income individuals, and local work-based job and training initiatives.
- Cutting Taxes to Spur Hiring by Small Businesses: This hearing would focus on proposals to cut payroll taxes in half for 98% of businesses; eliminate payroll taxes for companies that add workers or increase wages; extend 100% expensing into 2012; and help small businesses access capital.
- Supporting Veterans, Teachers, Police, and Firefighters: This hearing would focus on a proposal for a Returning Heroes Tax Credit of up to \$5,600 for hiring unemployed veterans, as well as a proposal to invest \$35 billion to help states and localities prevent layoffs of up to 280,000 teachers and keep thousands of police officers and firefighters in their jobs.

I am encouraged that Rep. Jim Jordan, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs, Stimulus Oversight and Government Spending, plans to hold a hearing next Tuesday on the President's proposal, but a single subcommittee hearing is insufficient to fully address a matter of such critical importance to the nation. In my opinion, this issue should be elevated to the full Committee, and we should launch this series of hearings on a bipartisan basis to examine carefully each component of the President's proposal in detail.

Earlier this week, Speaker Boehner and Majority Leader Cantor wrote to President Obama, striking a more conciliatory tone than they had before the August recess. They stated: "While it is important that we continue to debate and discuss our different approaches to job creation, it is also critical that our differences not preclude us from taking action where there is common agreement."⁵ I agree wholeheartedly, and in that spirit, I ask that our staffs meet to discuss the Committee's approach in the days and weeks ahead.

Sincerely,



Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member

⁵ Letter from House Speaker John Boehner and Majority Leader Eric Cantor to President Barack Obama (Sept. 6, 2011).