

AMENDMENT 217 -- SAVE TAXPAYERS \$8 MILLION BY ELIMINATING BRIDGE TOURIST ATTRACTION PROGRAM

OUR HIGHWAY TRUST FUND IS BANKRUPT BECAUSE OF POOR SPENDING DECISIONS

DUPLICATION AMONG PRESERVATION PROGRAMS

OTHER NEEDS COME FIRST

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OBAMA RECOMMENDS CONSOLIDATING THIS PROGRAM

The National Historic Covered Bridge Preservation Program (NHCBP) was established in the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century bill (TEA-21) in 1998. This program may only fund bridges listed in the Department of Interior's (DOI) National Register of Historic Places.¹

The program provides grants to repair or rehabilitate a dozen or so covered bridges each year. About \$500,000 per year is also appropriated for research and technological development to improve covered bridge maintenance.² In total \$60.4 million has been appropriated for this program.³

Year	Funding Amount
1999	\$0
2000	\$8,000,000
2001	\$9,000,000
2002	\$2,800,000
2003	\$6,000,000
2004	\$0
2005	\$0
2006	\$8,600,000
2007	\$9,200,000

¹ <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/bridge/covered.cfm>

² <http://www.forestprod.org/smallwood10duwadi.pdf>

³ E-Mail from Congressional Research Service, March 14, 2011

2008	\$8,300,000
2009	\$8,500,000

All Southwest and Northwest states do not have any bridges covered under this program. Over 75 percent of all eligible bridges are in six states: PA, OH, VT, IN, NH, OR.⁴

According to the executive director of the Historic Bridge Foundation, “While some covered bridges are still in use, others have been bypassed in favor of steel bridges. The covered bridges' main function now is to look scenic and attract tourists.”⁵

DUPLICATION AMONG PRESERVATION PROGRAMS

While this program happens to be administered by the Department of Transportation (DOT) and funded with Highway Trust Fund (HTF) dollars that could be used to repair deficient bridges and highways, there are numerous other federal preservation programs.

For example, DOI oversees multiple, overlapping historic preservation programs. Every federal agency is required to maintain a historic preservation program⁶ and must appoint a historic preservation officer and comply with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The Historic Preservation Fund (which is funded by oil receipts in the outer continental shelf for state and tribal preservation activities as specified in the NHPA)⁷ has about \$80 million in annual appropriations. The Heritage Preservation Services (DOI/NPS) office oversees nine preservation programs, including the Federal Agency Preservation Assistance Program, the Historic Preservation Planning Program, and Technical Preservation Services for Historic Buildings.⁸

Even at DOI, President Obama has recommended eliminating two duplicative preservation programs: The Preserve American program⁹ and

⁴ <http://www.forestprod.org/smallwood10duwadi.pdf>

⁵ Lowy, Joan, New federal budget austerity endangers program aimed at preserving historic covered bridges, Associated Press, March 9, 2011, <http://www.startribune.com/nation/117664493.html>

⁶ http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/fapa_p.htm

⁷ <http://www.nps.gov/history/HPS/hpg/HPF/index.htm>

⁸ <http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/>

⁹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2011/assets/trs.pdf>, page 48

the Save America's Treasures Program.¹⁰ Both of these programs were recently created to “provide planning funding to support preservation efforts through heritage tourism, education, and historic preservation planning” and to preserve historically significant properties. The President has twice recommended eliminating this program because it has not demonstrated how it contributes to National historic preservation goals and lacks rigorous performance metrics and evaluation efforts.¹¹ The President believes these programs should be terminated in a time of difficult trade-offs.¹²

In addition to these DOI programs, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation “is an independent federal agency that promotes the preservation, enhancement, and productive use of our nation's historic resources, and advises the President and Congress on national historic preservation policy.”¹³

Lastly, Members of Congress have also managed to create a Historic Preservation Tax Credit, which is a 20 or 10 percent tax credit which can be applied to preservation efforts of historic buildings.¹⁴ This subsidy is expected to total \$400 million in federal funds for FY10 – including \$300 million for corporations – and \$600 million in FY11.¹⁵

It is questionable why highway dollars are being spent on a historical preservation program in the first place. The fact that there are numerous other federal preservation programs reinforces that this program is not appropriate or necessary.

OTHER NEEDS COME FIRST

The historic Chambers Railroad covered bridge in Cotton Grove, OR, that received a \$1.3 million grant from the National Historic Covered Bridge Preservation Program in FY08¹⁶ is set to be destroyed and rebuilt as a

¹⁰ <http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/hpg/preserveamerica/>

¹¹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2011/assets/trs.pdf>, page 48

¹² “Fiscal Year 2012 Terminations, Reductions, and Savings,” Office of Management and Budget, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2012/assets/trs.pdf>, Page 64

¹³ <http://www.achp.gov/aboutachp.html>

¹⁴ http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/download/HPTI_brochure.pdf,

¹⁵ http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110_cong_senate_committee_prints&docid=f:45728.pdf#page=392

¹⁶ <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/bridge/nhcbp/090112a.cfm>

tourist destination, with better access and historical panels. The city is chipping in less than \$140,000 for the project.¹⁷

Madison, IA, received \$375,000 through the federal preservation program to install infrared cameras and fire detection equipment on its bridges after arson fires destroyed one bridge and another arson fire nearly destroyed a bridge.

According to a recent *AP* news story, “even the county official in charge of the bridges of Madison County says other needs come first.” Todd Hagan, Madison county's engineer and head of the local covered bridge program, said Madison needs federal help keeping its roads paved more than it needs covered bridge aid. Paving expenses, he said, may force Madison to return some roads to gravel.¹⁸

If a recipient of one of these grants can agree that this program does not address national priorities, why can't Congress?

OUR HIGHWAY TRUST FUND IS BANKRUPT BECAUSE OF POOR SPENDING DECISIONS

Congress never bailed out the HTF in its history until 2008. In 2008, Congress passed the first ever HTF bailout of \$8.017 billion transfer from the general funds to the highway account.¹⁹ It was hoped that this amount would be sufficient to get the HTF through the end of the 2005 SAFETEA authorization period, but in 2009, Congress passed another bailout for \$7 billion (H.R. 3357) in July and then in February of 2010, the HIRE Act (H.R. 2847) included a General Fund bailout of \$20 billion.²⁰ This means that in less than three years, Congress has already transferred \$35 billion to the HTF without changing spending transportation spending levels.

At the same time, Congress has increased appropriations from the HTF on frivolous and unrelated spending. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that \$78 billion in HTF monies was obligated for “purposes

¹⁷ <http://www.kpic.com/news/local/84644932.html>

¹⁸ Lowy, Joan, New federal budget austerity endangers program aimed at preserving historic covered bridges, Associated Press, March 9, 2011, <http://www.startribune.com/nation/117664493.html>

¹⁹ P.L. 110-318 was enacted September 15, 2008.

²⁰ <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/112xx/doc11230/hr2847.pdf>

other than construction and maintenance of highways and bridges” from 2004 to 2008.²¹

Among these spending priorities were the following:

- \$3.7 billion on transportation enhancement projects like landscaping or bike trails;
- \$224 million on Projects to rehabilitate and operate historic transportation buildings, structures, and facilities;²²
- \$28 million to establish 55 transportation museums;²³
- \$121 million for Ferryboats and Ferry Terminal Facilities.²⁴

While politicians are debating increasing federal gas taxes on consumers during a time of economic hardship, they should first ensure that precious highway dollars aren't misspent on tourist attractions that compromise our transportation infrastructure and increase our record-high deficit.

OBAMA RECOMMENDS CONSOLIDATING THIS PROGRAM

President Barack Obama's budget proposal for 2012 would eliminate 55 Department of Transportation programs, including the National Historic Covered Bridge Preservation Program and merge them into five separate accounts. Most projects would still be eligible for highway funding, but would have to compete with other highway and bridge projects for funds.²⁵

Similarly, this amendment wouldn't prohibit federal funding for these historic landmarks, but it would eliminate an entire spending account dedicated to maintaining, rebuilding and developing tourist attractions. If states believe such activity warrants precious transportation dollars they are welcome to make that decision.

²¹ Herr, Phillip, "Highway Trust Fund Expenditures on Purposes Other than construction and Maintenance of highways and Bridges during Fiscal Years 2004-2008," Government Accountability Office, June30, 2009,

²² http://coburn.senate.gov/public_files/OutofGas730Final0.pdf

²³ http://coburn.senate.gov/public_files/OutofGas730Final0.pdf

²⁴ http://coburn.senate.gov/public_files/OutofGas730Final0.pdf

²⁵ Lowy, Joan, New federal budget austerity endangers program aimed at preserving historic covered bridges, Associated Press, March 9, 2011, <http://www.startribune.com/nation/117664493.html>

As Isabel Sawhill, an economist with the Brookings Institution, points out, "I love covered bridges, but I don't think it should be a federal responsibility to preserve them."²⁶

Additionally, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) endorses this amendment its leadership recognizes this program siphons highway dollars from priority transportation projects.[1]

Passing this amendment would eliminate about \$8 million in annual appropriations.

²⁶ Lowy, Joan, New federal budget austerity endangers program aimed at preserving historic covered bridges, Associated Press, March 9, 2011, <http://www.startribune.com/nation/117664493.html>

^[1] E-Mail from Oklahoma Department of Transportation, March 14, 2011