

**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE JAMES L. OBERSTAR
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
HEARING ON “RECOVERY ACT: 10-WEEK PROGRESS REPORT FOR TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAMS”
APRIL 29, 2009**

Ten weeks ago, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 was signed into law, marking the culmination of more than a year’s work by the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure to ensure that infrastructure investment programs play a key role in our nation’s economic recovery.

In December 2007, when this Committee made its first proposal to “Rebuild America” by investing in transportation and environmental infrastructure, unemployment in the construction industry was 968,000.

In September 2008, when the House passed H.R. 7110, the “Job Creation and Unemployment Relief Act of 2008”, construction unemployment was 970,000, essentially unchanged from the previous December, even though it was the height of construction season.

Now, as of March 2009, construction unemployment stands at 1,979,000, more than double what it was when we made our first proposal.

At long last, on February 17, 2009, the Recovery Act was signed into law, and \$64.1 billion was provided for programs within this Committee’s jurisdiction. And now it is time to prove that these programs are up to the challenge of putting America back to work.

Today, we will hear from the Federal, State, and local agencies that administer these programs regarding how they are rising to this challenge and what progress has been made to date.

I am particularly pleased that we will be hearing from Secretary of Transportation LaHood, in his first appearance before this Committee since leaving us as a House colleague. I also extend a warm welcome to EPA Administrator Jackson in her first appearance before this Committee, as well.

To provide additional insight into what progress has been made, I am pleased to share the results of the vigorous oversight that the Committee has already done. Just ten days after the Recovery Act was signed into law, the Committee requested transparency and accountability information directly from States, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), and public transit agencies. The numbers speak for themselves. According to the submissions received by the Committee, as of March 31, 2009, just 42 days after President Obama signed the Recovery Act, a total of 1,380 highway and transit projects in 47 States and the District of Columbia, totaling \$6.4 billion, had been put out to bid. Of these 1,380 projects, 364 highway and transit projects were already under contract, including 263 projects in 30 States on which work had already begun. These 263 projects have a total cost of \$1.1 billion and, as of March 31st, had resulted in more than 1,250 workers getting off the bench and back on the job.

Throughout development of the Recovery Act, I emphasized the importance of transparency and accountability and ensured that the transportation and infrastructure provisions should be subject to the most rigorous transparency and accountability requirements of the Act. I am pleased that the Obama administration adopted many of these ideas, not just for transportation, but for all programs funded under the Act.

I also promised that the Committee would vigorously oversee implementation of the Recovery Act. The hard work of oversight has just begun. The Committee will continue to require periodic direct reporting to the Committee by recipients of transportation and infrastructure funds under the Recovery Act to ensure that the funds are invested quickly, efficiently, and in harmony with the job-creating purposes of the Act. In addition, the Committee will continue to hold public hearings to examine the successes and challenges under the Act.

With a few exceptions, I am very pleased with the progress that has been made in the first 10 weeks since enactment of the Recovery Act, but it is just a beginning.

I look forward to hearing the testimony of today's witnesses and discussing what is being done to ensure that Recovery Act funds are creating good, family-wage jobs as quickly as possible, while also improving our deteriorating infrastructure and laying the foundation for our future economic growth.

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