

FLOOR STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE JAMES L. OBERSTAR
CONFERENCE REPORT ON
H.R. 1, THE AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT OF 2009
FEBRUARY 13, 2009

- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in strong support of the Conference Report on H.R. 1, the “American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009”.

- According to the employment statistics released by the Department of Labor last week, as of January 2009, there are 11.6 million unemployed persons in the U.S., for all sectors of the economy combined. In addition, when part-time and discouraged workers who want full-time jobs are included, the number of unemployed/under-employed workers increases to 22.3 million.

- The construction sector has been particularly hard-hit -- it has the highest unemployment rate (**18.2 percent**) of any industrial sector. As of January 2009, there were **1,744,000 unemployed construction workers** in the nation.

- **This bill is urgently needed to put Americans back to work.** The infrastructure investments funded by this bill will create good, family-wage jobs -- jobs that cannot be outsourced to another country, because the work must

be done here in the U.S. on our roads, bridges, transit and rail systems, airports, waterways, wastewater treatment facilities, and Federal buildings.

- For more than a year now, I have worked to ensure that infrastructure investment plays a key role in our nation's economic recovery.
- I thank Chairman Obey for working so closely with me in this effort. We consulted extensively on the transportation and infrastructure provisions in the bill. Through his efforts and those of his staff, we were able to retain many of the good provisions in the House bill that were not in the Senate bill, and to develop good compromises where the bills differed. I particularly appreciate the hard work of Beverly Pheto, Staff Director, and Kate Hallahan and David Napoliello of the Transportation Subcommittee.
- The legislation before us today does not include everything I had proposed. While I would have preferred increased funding levels, and tighter use-it-or-lose-it deadlines, I do not intend to let “perfect” become the enemy of “good”.
- This is a “good” bill. It is desperately needed by the American people, and it deserves our support.

- This bill provides **\$64.1 billion** for Transportation and Infrastructure Committee infrastructure investments. This funding will create or sustain **1.8 million jobs** and generate **\$322 billion of economic activity**. **It will get construction workers off the bench and back on the job!**

- To ensure that the purpose of this legislation is achieved, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure will exercise vigorous oversight over the economic recovery funds within its jurisdiction. Federal agencies and grant recipients within our Committee’s jurisdiction must understand that “business as usual” is not good enough anymore, and they will be held accountable to a high standard. We will insist that States, cities, and transit agencies live up to their assurances that they will be able to **have contracts in place in 90 days** for a substantial portion of the funding authorized by this bill. We will insist that projects under this bill be new projects, not simply replacements for projects which States were planning to carry out under existing programs. We will insist that Federal agencies expedite the process of approving projects and awarding grants.

- With aggressive action by Federal agencies and grant recipients, the infrastructure funds provided by this bill can produce a substantial number of

- I thank Speaker Pelosi, Chairman Obey, Chairman of the Committee on Appropriations, Chairman Olver, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies, and our colleagues for working with me and other Members of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure throughout the development of this legislation.

- I strongly urge my colleagues to join me in supporting the Conference Report on H.R. 1, a true investment in America's future.