AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

THE INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND JOBS ACT'S BENEFITS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON UNDERSERVED, AGRICULTURAL, AND RURAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS
UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

HEARING HELD
FEBRUARY 15, 2022

Small Business Committee Document Number 117–045
Available via the GPO Website: www.govinfo.gov

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE
46–800 WASHINGTON : 2022

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

NYDIA VELÁZQUEZ, New York, *Chairwoman*
JARED GOLDEN, Maine
JASON CROW, Colorado
SHARICE DAVIDS, Kansas
KWEISI MFUME, Maryland
DEAN PHILLIPS, Minnesota
MARIE NEWMAN, Illinois
CAROLYN BOURDEAUX, Georgia
TROY CARTER, Louisiana
JUDY CHU, California
DWIGHT EVANS, Pennsylvania
ANTONIO DELGADO, New York
CHRISSY HOULAHAN, Pennsylvania
ANDY KIM, New Jersey
ANGIE CRAIG, Minnesota
BLAINE LUETKEMEYER, Missouri, *Ranking Member*
ROGER WILLIAMS, Texas
JIM HAGEDORN, Minnesota
PETE STAUBER, Minnesota
DAN MEUSER, Pennsylvania
CLAUDIA TENNEY, New York
ANDREW GARBARINO, New York
YOUNG KIM, California
BETH VAN DUYNE, Texas
BYRON DONALDS, Florida
MARIA SALAZAR, Florida
SCOTT FITZGERALD, Wisconsin

MELISSA JUNG, *Majority Staff Director*
ELLEN HARRINGTON, *Majority Deputy Staff Director*
DAVID PLANNING, *Staff Director*

CONTENTS

OPENING STATEMENT

	Page
Hon. Jared Golden	1
Hon. Roger Williams	3

WITNESSES

Mr. Ed Mortimer, Vice President, Transportation Infrastructure, United States Chamber of Commerce, Washington, DC	5
Mr. Mark Ouellette, President and Chief Executive Officer, Axiom Technologies, LLC, Machias, ME	7
Mr. Jason J. Shedlock, Regional Organizer, Laborers' International Union, New England Region Organizing Fund, President, Maine State Building & Construction Trades Council, Portland, ME	9
Mr. Terrance Lee Baker, Owner, Operator, and Independent Contractor, T.L. Baker Pilot Car Escort Services, Blooming Prairie, MN	11

APPENDIX

Prepared Statements:	
Mr. Ed Mortimer, Vice President, Transportation Infrastructure, United States Chamber of Commerce, Washington, DC	28
Mr. Mark Ouellette, President and Chief Executive Officer, Axiom Technologies, LLC, Machias, ME	31
Mr. Jason J. Shedlock, Regional Organizer, Laborers' International Union, New England Region Organizing Fund, President, Maine State Building & Construction Trades Council, Portland, ME	33
Mr. Terrance Lee Baker, Owner, Operator, and Independent Contractor, T.L. Baker Pilot Car Escort Services, Blooming Prairie, MN	36
Questions for the Record:	
None.	
Answers for the Record:	
None.	
Additional Material for the Record:	
JCN - Jobs Creators Network	39

THE INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND JOBS ACT'S BENEFITS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON UNDERSERVED, AGRICULTURAL,
AND RURAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 11:01 a.m., via Zoom, Hon. Jared Golden [chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Golden, Carter, Delgado, Williams, and Stauber.

Chairman GOLDEN. I will go ahead and call this hearing to order.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess at any time.

Let me begin by noting a few requirements. First, let me say that standing House and Committee rules and practice will continue to apply during remote proceedings. House regulations require Members to be visible through video connection throughout the proceeding, so keep your cameras on and remain muted until recognized in order to minimize background noise. If we do have any issue with that we will pause and ask individuals to mute themselves or staff to do it for them.

In the event a Member encounters technical issues that prevent them from being recognized for their questioning, I will move to the next available Member of the same party and I will recognize that Member at the next appropriate time slot provided they have returned to the proceeding. Should a Member's time be interrupted by technical issues, I will recognize that Member at the next appropriate spot for the remainder of their time once their issues have been resolved.

If we have technical issues, we may need to recess the proceedings in order to address them.

And with that, let's turn to today's business.

Last November, the president signed the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The law allocates $550 billion in new funds for transportation infrastructure projects, supply chain improvements, broadband expansion, and water system upgrades. This represents the most significant investment in American infrastructure since the Federal Aid Highway Act in 1956.

American infrastructure has for too long been in decline. Decades of underinvestment led to a decline in the quality of roads, bridges, airports, and other types of hard infrastructure. Both parties have recognized that this trajectory was unsustainable and the effort to pass the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law was genuinely bipartisan. Democrats and Republicans in Congress, along with the White House, worked to pass this once-in-a-generation bill and I was proud to play a role in making this bill a reality, along with my bipartisan colleagues in the Problem Solvers Caucus and in the United States Senate. Together, we accomplished a goal that has been pursued by Congress for many years under many different administrations and have delivered for the country on an important need.

The law will benefit communities across the country. In Maine, it is projected to invest $1.3 billion in roads, $225 million for bridges, $390 million to remove dangerous lead pipes and mitigate PFAS contamination and more than $100 million for affordable broadband expansion. These investments are more than just dollar figures. They will lead to positive change and are critical for the states' economy and for economic growth.

When I talk to small business owners in my district, the conversation often has turned through the years to infrastructure. They rely on our roads, bridges, and broadband to reach customers and to deliver their goods and services. Unfortunately, many entrepreneurs tell me that the sad state of American infrastructure has hampered their ability to grow.

This law speaks to their concerns because it is designed specifically to help small firms compete for contracts awarded with the funds it provides. Small construction firms and other types of businesses will play a direct role in building and repairing infrastructure projects funded by this law.

But there are also many more longer-term impacts for small employers that are important to highlight. There is an emphasis on funding for rural broadband networks to encourage more economic development and revitalization in rural communities. In my state, at least 83,000 people still do not have access to a fixed, high-speed Internet connection, a figure that likely understates the problem given what this Committee has heard in testimony through the last couple of years about how we measure broadband availability.

This lack of access to high-speed broadband has proven to be an economic drain on many communities, impacting individual success and education, wealth, and access to opportunities. By increasing access to reliable broadband will help close the digital divide and empower rural small business owners.

This law will also help the supply chain pressures that are causing delays, shortages, and higher prices for small firms as we look into the future. By improving the poor condition of our roads, bridges, rail, and ports, we can help improve arrival time for goods that are key for our business owners. Obviously, they all need to be able to deliver goods in a timely manner to their clients. It is just part of being a good business. Investing in domestic manufacturing is another critical need that can make our supply chain more resilient in the face of global crises such as the pandemic that we dealt with over the last 2 years.

The bill also dedicates funding to workforce development and will invest in programs to ensure that small firms have access to a labor force that is skilled and ready for competition in the rest of the 21st century.

It is critical that we fully understand how this law will help our nation's entrepreneur community, so today I look forward to hearing from our panel about ways that small firms can best utilize the available infrastructure resources to the benefit of their communities and to their businesses.

With that, I would like to yield to the Ranking Member today, Congressman Williams. Thank you for joining us.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing today. And I want to also say that we miss Mr. Hagedorn who is not with us today but he is a hard guy to follow and we want to say we miss him.

Infrastructure was once a common ground where Members on both sides of the aisle agreed. However, today, rather than focusing on areas of importance to our economy and our constituencies, such as improvements to our roads, waterways, bridges, railways, and broadband, my democratic colleagues are focusing on policies made of radical ideas such as the Green New Deal. The Infrastructure Law where only a fraction of the new spending will be going towards traditional infrastructure adds hundreds of billions of dollars in new debt, and let's face it, will only lead to higher taxes, continued inflation, and will only make America less competitive. Furthermore, nothing in the law was done to make any meaningful improvements to regulatory and permitting processes, which is something plaguing many small businesses today.

As we hold this hearing, inflation soars at a 40 year high, 7.5 percent, and gas prices have spiked at the highest price since 2014. Rising costs continue to create uncertainty for small businesses and makes it hard to compete with big businesses who have larger pricing flexibility, long-term contracts, and preferential purchasing agreements.

It is no surprise that a recent survey from Goldman Sachs found 76 percent of small business owners report that inflation had a negative impact on their business's financial health over the past 6 months. We are also experiencing record-breaking backlogs at our ports, resulting in supply chain disruptions. And just last week, the New York Times headline read this. It said, "A normal supply chain is unlikely in 2022."

The economic headwinds do not stop there as the labor shortage continues to stifle growth. With 10.9 million open positions across the nation, the economy is still nearly 3 million jobs short of its pre-pandemic peak. NFIB reports that almost half of all small business owners have job openings they cannot fill. And further, 93 percent of small businesses that were actively trying to hire found little to no qualified applicants.

The rising cost of goods, delays in material, and labor deficiencies are harmful for the construction industry and cause infrastructure projects to be more costly and take longer to complete. So instead of providing solutions, this administration, the Biden administration, has forced government mandates on businesses and employees and halted America's energy independence. Many people claim to

support small businesses but they ignore the calls to reduce burdensome regulations and put a stop to the current tax and spending agenda. Washington cannot continue this reckless spending habit. We must implement pro-growth policies that support small businesses in combatting the current economic challenges.

As the administration continues to provide cost and implementation guidance for the Infrastructure Bill, it is imperative these projects are funded in a responsible manner, and small businesses and rural communities are not left behind. We must empower entrepreneurs in state and local governments to be in the driver seat, not bureaucrats in Washington, D.C.

So, I look forward to hearing the testimonies of the witnesses today, and Mr. Chairman, as a small business owner, I think that we have real issues to address. So, I yield back.

Chairman GOLDEN. Thank you.

Very quickly, I will offer some direction into how the hearing will proceed for our panel. Each witness is going to start off with 5 minutes to provide a statement and each Committee Member will have 5 minutes for questions. Please ensure that your microphone is on when you begin speaking. I am sure someone today will probably start having forgot. Do not worry; we will remind you and you will get your full 5 minutes but try to think ahead on that one. And of course, when you are done, please go back to mute.

On to witness introductions. Our first witness today is coming to us from the Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Ed Mortimer, vice president of Transportation Infrastructure at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. He has experience advocating for infrastructure investment through the small business lens and played an integral role in negotiating the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. He also leads the Americans for Transportation Mobility Coalition where he works alongside businesses, labor organizations, transportation stakeholders, and concerned citizens to advocate for improved and increased federal investment in the nation's transportation system.

Thank you for joining us today, Mr. Mortimer.

Our second witness, Mark Ouellette is president and CEO of Axiom Technologies. He has held a number of senior leadership positions in the State of Maine. Previously, he was the executive director of Mobilize Maine and has 20 years of economic and community development experience. As president of a full-service broadband provider in the State of Maine, his testimony will help us understand the importance of broadband to our rural small businesses.

Thank you, Mr. Ouellette, for joining us.

Third, Mr. Jason Shedlock, president of the Main State Building and Construction Trades Council and regional organizer for the Laborers' International Union of North America's New England Region. In a prior lifetime, he served as a special assistant to Portland Mayor Ethan Strimling, and served as chief of staff for D.C. Councilman Phil Mendelson. He has demonstrated a true commitment through the years to workers in our state as a gubernatorial appointee to both the Maine State Workforce Board and the Maine Apprenticeship Council alongside his position as an Executive Board Member of the Maine AFL-CIO.

Mr. Shedlock, thank you for being here today.

And I will now recognize Congressman Williams to introduce our final witness.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for extending me this opportunity to introduce Mr. Terrance Baker on behalf of my colleague and good friend from Minnesota, Congressman Hagedorn who is unable to join us today and we miss him.

Mr. Baker is the owner of T.L. Baker Pilot Car Escort Services in Blooming Prairie, Minnesota. Not only is Mr. Baker a hard-working small business owner, but he is also a veteran and served in the United States Navy as a lieutenant commander and is a Naval tactics instructor. Mr. Baker, we thank you for your service. In 2010, Mr. Baker started T.L. Baker Pilot Car Escort Services, which escorts oversized and over dimensional vehicles, directs traffic, and operates specialized trailers. T.L. Baker Pilot Car Escort Services is one of the numerous businesses who have been impacted by rising gas prices, supply chain disruptions, and burdensome regulations. Mr. Baker is constantly on the road and will provide us with a unique perspective on infrastructure projects and the challenges small businesses face today.

Mr. Baker, I cannot thank you enough for joining us today. We look forward to hearing more about your small business experience and on-the-road experience. And I also want to thank all of our other witnesses for joining us today.

And Maine is certainly represented well, Mr. Chairman. And I yield back.

Chairman GOLDEN. Thank you very much. I am certainly very proud of Maine as no doubt you all are of Texas. And we are happy to have some good representation from Minnesota as well.

I have seen a lot of testimony from people from Minnesota, Mr. Baker, in the last few years. In the last Congress on this Committee, I served alongside Pete Stauber as Ranking Member who had a lot of great people from your state come and testify before the Committee and now I have had the great opportunity to serve alongside Jim Hagedorn. And I will add my thoughts and prayers alongside Congressman Williams for Jim's ongoing health, and we look forward to seeing him back in the halls of Congress in Washington.

We will start with panel testimony here. First up will be Mr. Mortimer for 5 minutes.

STATEMENTS OF ED MORTIMER, VICE PRESIDENT, TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE, UNITED STATES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE; MARK OUELLETTE, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AXIOM TECHNOLOGIES, LLC.; JASON J. SHEDLOCK, REGIONAL ORGANIZER, LABORERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION, NEW ENGLAND REGION ORGANIZING FUND, PRESIDENT, MAINE STATE BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION TRADES COUNCIL; TERRANCE LEE BAKER, OWNER, OPERATOR, AND INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR, T.L. BAKER PILOT CAR ESCORT SERVICES

STATEMENT OF ED MORTIMER

Mr. MORTIMER. Great. Good morning, Chairman Golden, Congressman Williams, and distinguished Members of this Sub-

committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on this critical issue to the business community.

My name is Ed Mortimer and I serve as vice president of Transportation Infrastructure at the United States Chamber of Commerce. I also serve as executive director of the chamber-led Americans for transportation mobility.

Since 2000, this coalition that includes business, labor, and other interested stakeholders has been advocating for improved and modernized infrastructure. I am very honored today to be joined—Wyuna is one of our founding Members of our coalition and I am glad that Jason Shedlock is on this panel with me. Business and Labor have been together on these issues for many years. We may not agree on everything but we understand the importance of modernizing our infrastructure to both business and labor and we are glad to be hand-in-hand on these issues moving forward.

As Members of this Subcommittee know, 96 percent of Chamber Members have fewer than 100 employees, and 75 percent have fewer than 10. Since over 100 years, the Chamber has advocated for policies that help businesses, both large and small, create jobs and grow our economy.

And for more than 2 decades, we have been at the forefront of advocacy for investment in the modernization of America's aging physical infrastructure. We have led various coalitions to promote action at the federal, state, and local levels, to take an infrastructure that was the envy of the world and to modernize it. We know we have gone from a brick-and-mortar economy to ecommerce, and we really need federal action to have long-term economic growth. We have worked with Republican and Democrat administrations and Members of Congress over the years to have durable long-term policy.

There is an old say in Washington, "There is no Democrat or Republican bridge." These are American assets that each of us benefit from. We are grateful for Congress for passage of the historic Infrastructures, Investments, and Jobs Act that was recently signed into law. Is it a perfect bill? It is not. But again, this is bipartisan, durable policy that will allow our nation to move forward and allow small businesses to plan, to create jobs, and to grow for 50 years to come. For many communities, whether they are minority, Appalachia, tribal, agricultural, or rural, the dream of an inclusive social and economic infrastructure is not a reality. We believe this legislation can be a building block that will allow all of our partners to move forward with modernizing our nation's infrastructure. And again, it is a unique opportunity, once in a generation, Mr. Chairman, as you said, to close gaps that exist within our nation's infrastructure. It allows the private sector to bring innovation and technology that we have been having on the sideline for too long and allow us to think anew. Let's build modern infrastructure. Let's bring infrastructure that is more environmentally sensitive. Let's bring infrastructure that is going to connect rural America with our urban centers so every American has an opportunity for success.

As you all know, the Chamber has done studies with MetLife. And again, small business owners are starving for modern infrastructure, broadband, and the private sector is ready to deliver, in

partnership with all of our government leaders. But getting this legislation passed was a critical part of making that happen.

Again, you know, you talked, Mr. Chairman, about broadband. The private sector is prepared to work with the government to hit those underserved communities and to make sure that there is no one solution but that the private sector can work with our public partners to deliver. We have a broadband system that is the envy of the world. We need to make sure every citizen has that ability. And we think the $65 billion in this legislation can make that happen.

Another critical part of this legislation is going to be the modernization of project delivery. For too long it has taken too long to get a permit than it is to actually deliver a project. Under this bipartisan bill, we codified an executive order under the Trump administration, one federal decision that is going to streamline the permitting process without changing environmental law, without changing public input, but putting reasonable timelines and a transparent process so business owners, both large and small, are able to deliver more investment on projects and not just sitting in the permitting process.

Again, these investments for small business are going to be where they locate, how they are going to succeed in the future getting customers and providing the opportunity for their employees to get in front of this.

This is also an opportunity for small business to be part of this modernization, not just benefit from the investments but to make sure that they are part of the design, the construction, the maintenance. So we are going to reach out to underserved communities who may not have had these opportunities in the past and make sure that we can get the men and women to do these jobs.

So again, this is a once in a generational opportunity. The Chamber is glad to be a part of this effort and we look forward to working with the Subcommittee in implementation of this critical legislation. So thank you for this opportunity and look forward to your questions later in the session.

Chairman GOLDEN. Thank you, Mr. Mortimer. We look forward to that opportunity as well.

Next, we will hear from Mr. Ouellette. The floor is yours, sir.

STATEMENT OF MARK OUELLETTE

Mr. OUELLETTE. Thank you, Representative Golden. Good morning, and a shout out to the great state of Maine, my Representative Golden, Representative Williams, and the esteemed Members of the Committee. Thank you for the invitation to speak to you today as a rural small business located in "Downeast" Maine. Washington County, where my business is located, is called the Sunrise County, because we are the eastern-most county in the United States and the first to see the sunrise. At least we claim to be the first to see the sun rise. Our county is three times the size of Rhode Island with a population of 33,000 people. Our county sits within the largest congressional district east of the Mississippi that Representative Golden represents. It is big and very rural.

Axiom is an Internet service provider based in Machias, Maine, the county seat and a small business. We are a small business with

seven employees. We have been providing Internet service to some of the most difficult to reach homes in all of the United States for the past 18 years. During that time, it has sometimes been a struggle to keep the doors open, but we have persevered knowing that for much of our early years we were the only company willing to deliver an Internet connection to some of the most difficult to reach homes in rural Maine. Many of our original customers are still with us today.

Over time, we have invested in variety of technologies and now are deploying, almost exclusively, fiber optic Internet, commonly called broadband. Our company has taken advantage of several programs that were passed by Congress during the early days of the pandemic, and I come before you today as a proud small business owner with seven full-time employees and two part-time employees. Not only has pandemic relief kept all my employees working, but the funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act earmarked for broadband infrastructure investments, an amount estimated in Maine to be in the range of $250 million, will help me grow my business exponentially over the next 2 years, while also adding employees. We expect to grow from a $1 million company gross revenue to about a $5 million company as the broadband funding is deployed. And importantly, expect to offer healthcare to our employees for the first time, a struggle that has been with me for several years trying to get them the coverage that they so desperately need.

I do not think it can be overstated how big the economic impact of this bill will have on the Maine economy. Not only is my company adding jobs and growing, but the work we do will bring broadband to thousands of rural Mainers. It is simply a gamechanger. In Washington County and across rural Maine, we experience the digital divide every day. Those that do not have access to reliable, speedy internet are at a disadvantage, plain and simple. And the pandemic has exposed how important it is to make sure that children can access the Internet, Zoom with their teachers and complete homework assignments, while at the same time allowing parents to work remotely from home.

But the impact of broadband access goes even beyond that. They help elderly Mainers age in place by accessing telemedicine opportunities. One example, a previously unhooked up customer recently hooked up, is able to download his medical device information from home. Previously, he was having to travel 45 minutes each way to the nearest healthcare facility to download that information. A big gamechanger in his life.

Recently connected customers on Cranberry Isles, year-round islanders living off the coast of Maine connected by ferry to the mainland, now have the ability to work remotely for companies anywhere. A professor of physics from the University of Arizona will be able to work from his home in Roque Bluffs, Maine, when we hook him up with a fiber connection later this year. That is a community with a population of 303.

The bill also addresses affordability, a roadblock for rural families struggling to pay their bills. The benefit will provide qualified individuals with a $30 reduction on their monthly bill, really a

gamechanger for disadvantaged families. We look forward to administering that with folks in Maine.

Internet access is critical to keeping rural places vibrant and ensuring that all Mainers can create their own economy. The impact of the infrastructure bill, in short, will increase revenues at Axiom five times, add employees and healthcare while providing world-class Internet service to thousands of homes that lack broadband.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Chairman GOLDEN. Thank you, sir. Appreciate it.

I have heard some people call it the GSOM, the Great State of Maine. So, with that, one more witness from Maine, Mr. Shedlock.

STATEMENT OF JASON J. SHEDLOCK

Mr. SHEDLOCK. Thank you, Chairman Golden, Ranking Member Williams, and Members of this Subcommittee for this opportunity. My name is Jason J. Shedlock, and I represent the Laborers' International Union of North America, 500,000 plus strong united men and women, most of whom who dedicate their lives to building our nation's infrastructure. Specifically, I am one of over 300 Members of Laborers' Local 327 based in Augusta, Maine, as well as the president of the Maine State Building and Construction Trades Council, an organization comprised of 20 affiliated labor unions representing over 6,000 workers across the state.

I am pleased to be with you today to share some thought son behalf of the individuals who will be operationalizing the generational legislation that is the topic of this public hearing.

The bipartisan action taken in Washington will have far-reaching impacts on current and future working families across Maine and the nation. Certainly, a direct and immediate benefit of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act should and must be seen by the Members of our union and those of the entirety of the building trades unions. These highly-skilled sisters and brothers will build and rebuild the very communities where they live, while at the same time building and sustaining a middle-class career for themselves and their families.

Tradespeople like the laborers I represent stand ready to heed the call of lawmakers to fundamentally transform our nation's infrastructure. From groundbreaking to final delivery, my fellow Members build every sector of the construction industry. From skyscrapers and subways, to highways and bridges, from sidewalks to solar fields, we literally build America.

Now, if you have ever been to Maine, and I know the Chairman knows this will, you will undoubtedly notice that we do not have any skyscrapers per se or any subways in our state. That said, we are proud to be currently building the state's tallest building, located in the city of Portland, an 18-story hi-rise built by union laborers, operating engineers, iron workers, carpenters, electricians, elevator constructors, and more.

This legislation will finally address what the American Society of Civil Engineers calls Maine's C- infrastructure system. Three hundred fifteen bridges, 1,438 miles of highway are in poor condition, earning C- and D grades, respectively. This law will mean at least $1.3 billion for Maine's highways, $225 million for those bridges.

This represents a seismic change in our ability to invest in our state. What it also represents is the opportunity to make a seismic change in our workforce and our local economies. Through our top-notch training programs, Members hone their skills in emerging and cutting-edge technologies, making them the best and most nimble in the business. Through our registered apprenticeship programs, we ensure that the next generation of builders are equipped to secure their future with good pay, safe job sites, comprehensive benefits, and an even shot at retiring with dignity after an honest career.

I am proud to add that as the most diverse building trades union, the laborers' also continuously focus on outreach to traditionally underrepresented populations such as women, people of color, and veterans, to ensure that our workforce adequately reflects the community where our Members live, work, play, and pray.

To further amplify this law's effects on working families, the president's recent executive order mandating that all federally-funded projects of $35 million or more be performed under the gold standard of a Project Labor Agreement means that this investment will not only benefit every American but it will also translate to the surety of safety and respect for construction workers and our signatory contractors across America.

We are also currently in a challenging environment. Intertwined with our collective success is the worsening job crunch in Maine and in the country. No one feels this crunch harder than small businesses, including small and medium-sized construction contractors. By partnering with the laborers' union and our fellow trades, we in essence provide these businesses with an "easy button" as they can gain access to our highly-skilled construction workforce while at the same time enjoy the job opportunities related to this historic infrastructure investment.

I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge and appreciate the laborers' close working relationship with the U.S., as well as the regional and local Chambers of Commerce across America with respect to our nation's infrastructure. It is only by joining together with our partners in the business community that we will most effectively deliver on the tremendous promise of this legislation, and I thank Mr. Mortimer for his words as well.

Through this partnership, we can also help address the unacceptable reality of America's gender pay gap. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, while overall women earn 81.1 percent of what men in, in the construction industry that number increases to 99.1 percent. Further, according to the National Women's Law Center, unionized women earn 24 percent more than women who are not represented by a union.

Mr. Chairman, the overarching takeaway is very simple and was summed up very well by my general president, Terry O'Sullivan, upon the bill's signing. "The investment will put laborers to work in every community, revitalize our nation's economy, and open doors to the middle class for hundreds of thousands of working men and women."

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. As any good union laborer, I and my sisters and brothers, stand ready to

assist you in any way necessary as we work together to put this legislation into action, from groundbreaking to final delivery. Thank you.

Chairman GOLDEN. Thank you. I look forward to seeing those projects move forward, too, and those people working. And as we discussed, working closer to home. More on that later in regard to Maine.

But let's finish things up and hear from Mr. Baker for 5 minutes. Thank you, sir

Mr. BAKER. Okay. Am I unmuted here, sir? Oh, good.

Chairman GOLDEN. Loud and clear.

STATEMENT OF TERRANCE LEE BAKER

Mr. BAKER. Okay. Thank you to Representative Williams for that eloquent introduction. And I also want to express gratitude to my congressman, Representative Jim Hagedorn. And I add my thoughts and prayers for your speedy recovery, sir.

As already mentioned about my present employment, I am a pilot car owner and operator. And just to add to what Representative Williams already mentioned, when you happen upon an oversized load, it is always a spectacle on the highway. You will see flags, oversize load signs, police light bars with amber flashing lights. And typically, we have to block one or more lanes of traffic because of the dimensions of the load, and so our priority is to alert the driving public and to encourage them to maintain distance until we can get the load down the highway and keep everyone safe.

Through the years of doing this, I have operated through all of the 48 states of the Continental U.S. and a lot in Canada, specifically in Ontario, and especially in Québec. And so, a lot of infrastructure to see there. But I want to mention that it has always been a challenge because of fuel prices from 2010 to 2016. Climate initiatives have always kept diesel up somewhere near $4 a gallon. I was very thankful to get a reprieve 2017 through 2020 when for once we became energy independent and I was paying as little as $2 a gallon for diesel which immensely helped a small operator like me.

2020 promised to be a great year and then, bam, the Flu COVID crisis hit. Mask mandates, vaccine mandates, social distancing, the general flu hysteria. Restaurants, motels, hotels, truck stops—they were shut down. Job sites were shut down. Manufacturers of the oversized things that we hauled were shut down. Work stopped and my income stopped. Further complicating COVID, the governor of my state has now imposed California air standards on Minnesota. What is the impact of that? Well, sometime in the future I will not be able to renew the Minnesota registration on my pickup because I no longer meet California air standards.

Additionally, the state of Minnesota is now requiring that pilot cars based here take a Minnesota pilot car certification test, and it will no longer honor my Utah DOT certification. Coincidently and just in time, the new SBA director in January of 2021 offered loans and available money and small business support. I was grateful to see loans being offered at 3.75 percent with a payback period of 30 years up to a half million dollars. Well, I do not need a half

million dollars. I am just one guy with one vehicle but, yeah, please, send SOME of that money my way. I did apply for a loan and I am very happy to say SBA called me just this morning informing me, after I applied over a year ago, that finally the loan will be approved and we are waiting for funding on that.

So, I am looking at now refitting my pickup with California emissions equipment, buying a new California compliant vehicle, or moving out of state because of the new and onerous DOT and EPA standards. In the news, CPI is up to 7.5 percent, 40-year high. Well, every time I go to the diesel filling station, or go to the grocery store, or pay my heating bill, I do not see increases of only 7.5 percent. Diesel is up 80 percent. This last month, I paid $100 more to heat my house than I did a year ago. So what does this mean as a small business owner? I have to increase prices to my customers, my few remaining customers if I am going to stay profitable. And I am discovering they are not going to pay it. They will not pay it. It is too much.

So my observation iss, and I have limited time here, this administration could instantly, overnight, fix inflation and cost of living by just reopening domestic oil production. Open up Keystone. Finish the construction of the Keystone Pipeline. Get off the back of Pipeline 5 and Dakota Access operators. Let the oil flow. We are reminded that the cost basis of everything—goods, services, housing, food, transport is energy. It is ENERGY!!! Until we get that back down, we are going to keep spiraling downward.

In summary, I see in my co-drivers and people that I work with: fear, resentment, and hatred toward the present administration, and its policies are really mounting. People are getting frustrated out here because it is getting harder and harder to run a business, to survive. We cannot allow ourselves to be driven into poverty and destitution by SENSELESS policy. We need to look at Canada and really take that truckers' strike, pardon me, seriously. I think that will come here.

Thank you, Ranking Members and distinguished witnesses for listening and I have to yield up my time now.

Chairman GOLDEN. Thank you, Mr. Baker.

Next, we will move on to the question-and-answer phase of the hearing.

I will begin by recognizing myself. We will have several rounds of these time allowing, so please, it is certainly my intent to try and give each of you a little bit more time to talk about the issues that you want to address here today. I know time is pretty crunched with a 5-minute start on your opening statements, so I will start by recognizing myself.

This infrastructure bill is Chamber of Commerce endorsed; National Association of Manufacturers endorsed. Of course, part of it is built upon the foundation of our Surface Transportation Reauthorization, which really is all about infrastructure, $550 billion in addition plus to invest in our nation's infrastructure. Of that, $110 billion for roads and bridges, $39 billion for transit, $66 billion for rail. And I must point out a big portion of that is likely to go to freight, which is an economic driver for our businesses around the country. $25 billion for airports, $17 billion for ports. These are some big numbers and I think it is going to do some great things

for the American economy, not just in the near term but in the long run here for our infrastructure.

It is just critical as you pointed out, Mr. Mortimer. Can you talk a little bit more about why the Chamber of Commerce got behind this legislation? And I thank you for pointing out some of the regulatory reform that it did possess. You did say not a perfect bill, very few are, but the one federal decision permitting I think is going to go a long way towards speeding delivery and providing regulatory certainty to businesses, would you not say?

Mr. MORTIMER. Absolutely, Mr. Chairman. And again, you know, the Chamber of Commerce has got behind this because, look, we need federal investment to have a national network. Right? The Constitution called for the federal government to do two things. They may have wandered a bit beyond that and we could have a whole hearing on that. But the two things it called for is national defense and interstate commerce. So for businesses to succeed, we need the vision of Eisenhauer when he developed that interstate highway system. Teddy Roosevelt with the Inland Waterways. That network was the envy of the world but it has reached its useful conclusion.

My colleague, Mr. Shedlock, talked about the American Society of Civil Engineers' C-. So we needed to modernize. We needed the federal investment and vision to do that. State governments and local governments have been doing this over the last several years but they by themselves cannot make the type of investments to handle all the physical infrastructure we talked about in this hearing. You know, our road system and our transportation network is the backbone, but broadband, energy, all those things require, and it is not all on the federal government. It is a shared responsibility. But this legislation is going to provide the building block. And again, our view is these are going to be shovel worthy projects. These are going to be projects that are going to make our country succeed for the next 50 to 75 years. This is not a quick jolt.

To Congressman Williams's concern about inflation, the U.S. Chamber is very concerned about inflation, but we view these investments, again, as a long-term vision for our country that actually are going to be deflationary because they are long term. This is very different than 2009 when it was shovel ready and just hurry up. Let's get a bunch of people out there and fix some things. This is being strategic, long-term investments that are going to benefit small business owners for many years to come.

Chairman GOLDEN. You talked a little bit about partnering with the Committee to make sure that the implementation is done correctly or to see that some of these reforms in here are adhered to. How can we best work together, Mr. Mortimer, to make sure that small business firms represented by the Chamber of Commerce are going to capture the benefit of this work?

Mr. MORTIMER. Great question. So two things we really would like the Subcommittee to help us with. First of all, we need to get a full year, 2022 appropriations bill. Because we are on a continuing resolution, the full benefits of this legislation are not able to take place. So we are supporting Congressman Moulton, Congressman Katko. They have over 50 Members and growing, signing a letter to leadership, urging them to finish a full year appropria-

tions bill by the March 11th deadline. So again, let's get a bipartisan solution for a full year bill so we can fully implement the legislation.

Number two is this Subcommittee and your Full Committee has an opportunity to oversee the departments that are enacting this bill to make sure that small business has a voice. There are provisions in this bill, like in Federal Highways, 10 percent of funds can go to small business owners. We need to provide that oversight and make sure that they deliver on the promises made. And so, Congress and this Committee have a key role to make sure that as they roll out these guidances, and many are going to be rolling out in the next month, that you ensure that the congressional intent is being met.

And for those who did not vote for the bill, this is an opportunity to say let's—it is the law of the land—let's make it the most beneficial to our communities. So, let's take another look at this and let's see how we can make our communities fully benefit from the investments that this law can bring.

Chairman GOLDEN. I certainly agree with you about the importance of the oversight role of the Committee. And of course, also hoping that we will get a good omnibus.

My time is expired.

Next, we will recognize Congressman Williams.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would also like to enter into the record an op-ed from Job Creators Network titled "Nine ways Biden's feckless cabinet Members are contributing to our country's problems." This article highlights the failures of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Small Business Administration Administrator Isabel Guzman, and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, who continues, by the way, to defy the law by refusing to testify before this Committee. She is breaking the law. So, I want to get that in the record, Chairman.

Chairman GOLDEN. So ordered.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you. Thank you, again, and witnesses, for being here today. We appreciate you.

Skyrocketing inflation continues to create uncertainty for small business owners across the country. I am one of those small business owners. And while the Biden administration claimed that inflation had reached its peak months ago, working families and business owners are seeing the highest inflation in 40 years. I am in the automobile business and so I can tell you about that. A recent survey by the Jobs Creation Network and the National Federation of Small Businesses confirmed that inflation is the biggest concern among small business owners.

So, Mr. Baker, it is good to have you here today. And in your testimony, you mentioned that the rising cost of gas has caused you to pass along the price to your customers. Unfortunately, that happens when you are a business owner.

Can you expand on how the rising cost of goods has impacted your business and your customer base? And is there not a point where the cost is just too great to your customers to absorb?

Mr. BAKER. Yes, sir. I have fuel receipts from a year ago where I was paying $2.08 (per gallon) for diesel. Right now, I look out the window and I see the diesel price $3.89. that is over 80 percent,

sir. That is not 7.5 CPI. That is 80 percent. Everything for maintenance, vehicle maintenance and everything else is up accordingly. And I already mentioned hotels and truck stops. They have to increase their prices or they go out of business. So naturally, I have to raise my per mile rate when I am out escorting someone. And I used to be able to afford to deadhead out to New York or Québec to find work. That is running out alone with my vehicle to pick up work out of Montréal or Trois-Rivič1res. They have a lot of wind, had a lot of wind going on in 2020 before they closed the Canadian border. I cannot afford that anymore because when I go through Pennsylvania and New York, they are over 4 bucks a gallon for diesel. So, there is an example, sir.

And also, I wanted to mention, I know a lot of truckers who are over-the-road semi drivers. The California air emission standards forced a lot of them away from California ports. In fact, a majority of the truckers who service those ports are from out of state. When California doubled down on that ludicrous emissions requirement for the ports, the truckers shrugged and said, "...okay, we will go work Gulf Coast ports. We will go work out of Florida ports. You are not hurting us at all. Let us know how that works out, California!" That is why there is a supply chain problem there.

But, sir, I am happy to report at the beginning of 2020, I knew we were going to be down for COVID for a while so I took my pickup in, did a top engine overhaul and had to order a lot of parts from Germany. Bosch parts made in Germany. I experienced no supply chain problems at all because they were flown in or shipped in through Jacksonville, Florida. So there is the contrast and that is how onerous regulations in some states just kill us, adding to the cost of operations.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Let's continue.

As a small business owner myself, I have been in the automobile business for over 52 years, I know firsthand that the best thing for business is if government simply gets out of the way and lets business owners work in the free market. Let competition work. Let the consumer decide who is good and who is bad. Unfortunately, the American Action Forum reported that the Biden administration capped off its first full year in office with more than $201 billion—think of that, $201 billion in regulatory costs and 131 million hours in new annual paperwork to generate actually nothing. These kinds of burdensome regulations and requirements for you and myself create unnecessary barriers for all small businesses which prevents them from growing and contributing to the U.S. economy in a more substantial way, and frankly, giving service to the customer.

So, Mr. Baker, how do regulatory burdens impact your ability to maintain revenue, retain clients, and still grow your business? And you do not need Big Brother looking at it every single day.

Mr. BAKER. Yes, sir. I mean, it all revolves around cost. And as I mentioned before in my oral intro, the cost basis of everything is ENERGY. And as diesel keeps rising, it will be more and more difficult to come out with a net profit. And like I said, I have reached the limits where some customers tell me I cannot run with them anymore because I am charging too much. Well, I have to charge that much at a certain level just to remain profitable. Otherwise, it does not pay to go out the door anymore. I may as well sell my

pickup and go be a Walmart greeter because that is what inflation and these new regulations will force, as in the case of my state, California air emissions **in Minnesota**. Are you kidding? They are going to drive me out of business eventually if these costs keep rising, sir. I hope that answers your question.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Well, it did. And thank you for being a small business owner and taking risk in this great country.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman GOLDEN. Thank you. I am going to go ahead and recognize Congressman Stauber.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, Ranking Member Williams. I really appreciate the witnesses and hearing your testimony.

You know, Mr. Williams just said something very striking, and do not diminish his comment. The Biden administration in 1 year, by their own admittance, has added $200 billion of new regulatory cost on top of prior. That is $200 billion of regulatory cost, additional regulatory cost on small businesses in 1 year. We cannot have this. The small businesses represented here, Mr. Baker, I do not know how you can do that, add 7.5 percent inflation. We have always said that small business is the engine of our economy. And what we are doing is we are suffocating small business with these overburdensome regulations that some unelected bureaucratic thinks is a good idea to put on the American small business owner. They do not deserve that and we can do better.

So, Mr. Baker, for you. As the top Republican on the Natural Resources Subcommittee overseeing oil and gas development, I could not agree more with your comment in your testimony about the need to reopen federal lands to oil and gas development. Even in Minnesota where we have no oil and gas, how has Joe Biden's decision to ban federal oil and gas leases impacted your ability to run your pilot car business and the cost of fuel?

Mr. BAKER. Well, it has just escalated to the ridiculous. I mean, every day I look out the window or I drive by the diesel stop and it is up 5, 10 cents a gallon. Pretty soon we are going to be at $5 a gallon, over some nefarious environmental initiative which at its core philosophy demonizes carbon dioxide of all things. I would like to speak on that if I had the time but I do not want to overcomplicate my answer here. Just simply ENERGY, the cost of ENERGY is the basis of all my costs anymore and it drives everything else up—food, restaurants, truck stops, supplies, repair parts.

Mr. STAUBER. Well, Mr. Baker, give me an idea, give the panel an idea what the percentage of your overall commitment is for oil and gas. What has the increase in the gas cost you? Can you give us a number or a percentage of this past year's bill?

Mr. BAKER. Okay. I have got a 35-gallon fuel tank in my pickup and I used to be able to fill that, especially running down through Texas, $70 would top it off right to the top of the filler brim. If I fill now in my hometown, it is in excess of $130 to fill that tank. If I do a day escort run, and hoping to make $200 from the trucking company and then come back home, I will burn out nearly a tank of fuel just maneuvering around the load, keeping the traffic off of it, steering the trailer. I have to idle my pickup when it is cold just to stay alive. By the time I am done, I have spent almost

as much fuel as the trucking company pays me for that day. That is not good business. I cannot live that way. I cannot make a living that way.

Mr. STAUBER. So Mr. Baker, you are almost paying a half more than you were a year and a half ago. And so, in addition to paying almost double for the fuel and then the added $200 of additional burdensome regulations, small businesses are really hit hard and it is not right.

So, bureaucrats in Washington that come up with the onerous climate initiatives and regulations often do not consider impact on small business owners like yourself, Mr. Baker. We must eliminate hurdles for our small businesses so they can contribute to our economy and our infrastructure projects, not put in place more burdensome regulations or take steps to weaken our energy and supply chain independence. Mistakes like these only benefit large corporations who can afford such costly policies. Small business resiliency is how we guarantee America's resiliency. And I hope this administration starts taking that into account moving forward.

Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Chairman GOLDEN. The gentleman yields back.

We will now recognize Congressman Carter from Louisiana.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for the opportunity.

Mr. Mortimer, can you explain the benefits of historically underserved businesses like those owned by women, minorities, and veterans gaining access to state and federal contracts, particularly for surface transportation projects?

Mr. MORTIMER. Absolutely, Congressman. Thank you for the question.

So, you know, we have been very engaged in the business community to, you know, obviously, workforce development and workforce challenges are a big focus of the Chamber. And we created an Equality of Opportunity Initiative where one of the things we have heard when we talk to minority and women-owned businesses was they did not know where these opportunities existed; right? We did not have a lot of them at the federal level. But with passage of this legislation, one of our goals is to partner to make sure we go to those underserved and underutilized communities who did not even know these benefits happened. And if they do not have the workers there that have the job skills, let's get the job skills with the men and women so they can do these jobs. So, they do not just benefit from the infrastructure development but they actually are a part of it. And again, we know the communities around the country are starving for think of something anew. How would you love to be part of an effort to modernize infrastructure? And these jobs are not a 4-year college degree. These are training jobs.

My colleague on this panel, Mr. Shedlock, you know, we work with organized labor. They have great apprenticeship programs. The business community wants to copy those but we need to go to those communities themselves. We cannot have them come to us. We need to go to them. And so, the Chamber, through its Equality of Opportunity Initiative, we are reaching out around the country to those communities, making them aware of these opportunities. We created a website that shows all the government procurements

and contracts that are coming out and we are going to work with our state and local Chambers so they can work with those local communities to find men and women who, these are good jobs.

Mr. CARTER. And listen, I would love to work with you on that, Mr. Mortimer, because I will tell you, we just recently had the Secretary of Labor, Marty Walsh, in my district in Louisiana. And we went to some of our community colleges. We met with some of the stakeholders. And one of the repeating refrains, particularly people that are re-entering the workforce, people that had been recently incarcerated, who paid their debt to society, nonviolent criminals who are now back out and have skills and we should put them back in the workforce in addition to creating more opportunities for small and emerging businesses. So I am happy to hear you say that and I extend my hand to work with you and local chambers to make sure that we get into those communities that historically have been underserved and do not know these resources exist. So, I am happy to hear that you recognize, as I do, that we can have the best programs in the world. If people do not know they exist, they are doing us no good whatsoever. So thank you very, very much for that.

And I will ask you one final question. If you sat where we sit, if you were Members of this Committee, Members of Congress, and you had the opportunity to do something in addition to what has been done, what would you direct us to do that we can do better to help you serve our community?

Mr. MORTIMER. First of all, I look forward to the partnership with you on this effort because we are very serious about that commitment and the Chambers looks forward to working with you on that.

So, from your seat, and no offense, I am glad I am not a Member of Congress, but from your seats, I think, again, making sure that your communities put together priorities; okay? Because we cannot just trust state and local governments to deliver the projects that are truly going to be transformational. So businesses working with organized labor with the other stakeholder communities and make priorities. And then have community consensus around those priority projects. Those communities that are able to do that are going to be the ones most successful. If everyone is——

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Mortimer, thank you. I'm sorry to cut you off. I have just about a minute left and I want to really ask one quick question for Mr. Baker but I definitely want to follow up with you.

Mr. MORTIMER. Sure.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Baker, you know, we hear from small firms all the time about having trouble recruiting and retaining workers. Do you think government investment in workforce development would help expand the pool of skilled workers for businesses? And if not, what can we be doing better?

Mr. BAKER. Oh, I think that is obvious. I mean, if you provide training and opportunities for people seeking work, of course that would be helpful, sir.

Mr. CARTER. Do you think there are other ways that we might be able to weigh in to do that from your perspective? I will ask you as I asked Mr. Mortimer, are there other things that you think we can be doing better? And if so, could you share with us very briefly

in about 20 seconds on what you think we can do? Because our job here is to listen, to legislate, to govern, but we should not do that in a vacuum. We have to do that with the involvement of people like you and others that are on the panel today.

Mr. BAKER. Well, in my industry, there will always be a demand for truckers. I think fostering and encouraging a vocational training program for semi-truck drivers or pilot car operators would give that industry a boost and certainly employ or self-employ a great many more people. So a simple answer to your question, sir.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you very much.

I yield back, sir.

Chairman GOLDEN. Thank you. I appreciate that.

I have a few remaining questions. Certainly, Representative Carter, you are welcome to stay if you have others. It sounds like you might. And Congressman Williams, just let me know if you have additional questions at any point.

I was just going to work down the line starting with Mr. Ouellette. Just thinking about Washington County alone, what do you think the digital divide looks like maybe in just an estimated percentage of residents currently without access to broadband? And how important do you think that is to the prospects for economic development in Washington County?

Mr. OUELLETTE. Thank you, Representative Golden. I appreciate the opportunity.

There are at least 10 percent of the population that has no broadband whatsoever and is working off a cell phone, at least that. Probably closer to 15 percent, something of that range. Those who do not have access to broadband that meets the new state definition of 100 over 100 megabits per second are almost nonexistent. Only fiber connected customers can achieve that level of service and there are far and few in Washington County that have that service. We, through the CARES Act, we are now serving East Machias and Whiting, two small communities adjacent to where we operate out of Machias. Those communities now have access to world-class broadband. Basically, you can get better broadband in those communities today than you can get in New York City. No offense to New York City. So the kind of infrastructure from a broadband perspective that are going to be put into Washington County is really literally going to give a significant economic boost to all families who are currently underserved or unserved by their current broadband connection. Because as I am sure you are keenly aware, and those on the Committee that come from rural places, typically, a family has two, three, maybe even four jobs to keep themselves working. And giving them more tools to allow them to build their own economy in the way that they so choose while still living in a place that they love and not being forced to move or go to a different location to be able to do what they need to do to keep their family healthy, safe, and obviously active in the kinds of beautiful places that Washington County is and very many of your other representatives' locations in rural places across America is critical. So I see this as being, as I said in my testimony, a game changer, not just for Washington County but all of rural Maine, all of rural America from a broadband perspective. There is no reason,

frankly, that we should be lagging behind places like South Korea and other nations that many years ago invested in broadband infrastructure and put that in to help their citizens grow, and certainly, the pandemic has made this an acute problem that needs to be addressed in the Congress bipartisanly—is that a word, bipartisanly? Yeah, there you go. Really had the opportunity to address and pass this piece of legislation. And we are grateful because we know every day from our folks in Washington County how important and how large the digital divide is for those families that do not have service right now.

Yeah, go ahead.

Chairman GOLDEN. You know, Ed had mentioned that for those communities' consensus for projects, they are going to be best in place to take the full advantage of this law.

You mentioned in this bill a provision I think a lot of people do not know about where for those who need the help, who qualify because of their financial situation, they can get a $30 monthly bill reduction so they can afford this broadband. What other ways do you think we can work together, businesses like yours and this Subcommittee, to get the word out to communities about how best to take advantage of this law?

Mr. OUELLETTE. Yeah, thank you for the question. I appreciate that.

I think certainly that a great amount of education still needs to occur about what is contained within this bill and how Congress should communicate that information through the state or through the Members of Congress to different areas to try to effectively drill down into places where folks may not be aware of these kinds of programs or the kids of effects that the infrastructure bill is going to bring to places like rural Maine.

I think one of the big, I think, something very important from my perspective would be for representatives to really effectively come to the places where these funds could be effective and speak on them because I think Members of Congress maybe can have a great out-larged effect when they speak and I think, you know, people do not see enough of their representatives frankly in this environment because of the pandemic, because of the way you have had to hold your business over the last couple of years. So, we would love to see more Members of Congress out in the field talking about what this bill can bring. And I think that could be very effective for the Committee also.

Chairman GOLDEN. It sounds like an invitation to Washington County. We should set that up.

Mr. Williams, do you have any questions?

Mr. WILLIAMS. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Baker, or any of you can answer this, but I am a small business owner, employ hundreds of people. I am in the automobile business. I have for over 50 years. I am a big tax cutter. I ran on tax cuts in 2012 and won and I have won ever since. In 2016, we had the largest tax cuts in the history of our country, and created more cashflow than we have ever seen, and allowed business to invest and take risks and get rewarded. And that is what America is about.

Now, Mr. Baker, the Democrats talk about raising taxes, really frankly on everybody. And just raising taxes alone when we ought to be cutting taxes, frankly, what would that do to your business along with inflation and everything else you talked about today?

Mr. BAKER. Well, in combination with all of the above, Representative Williams, I pay taxes in two places, Minnesota and federal. Any raise in taxes would be even more devastating on top of already what I am dealing with. I am really considering moving to Texas, which is a no state income tax state, sir. I wish you would have me.

Mr. WILLIAMS. We will take you.

Mr. BAKER. Thank you.

Mr. WILLIAMS. But raising taxes does not do your business any good?

Mr. BAKER. No, definitely not. How does it benefit me? More dollars out of my pocket. Less operating funds. You know, the checkbook won't balance anymore.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Mr. Shedlock, you represent a lot of great businesses, a lot of great people. We are a right to work state in Texas but tax increases certainly could not help your businesses or your people, could they?

Mr. SHEDLOCK. Well, I appreciate the question, Congressman. You know, I think we are obviously all in this together and, you know, it is incumbent upon us to make sure that the promise 1:11:00xxx of this legislation is implemented. You know, the important thing when you invest in human beings who actually are holding those shovels of these projects that are shovel ready is that you are investing in a person and in a working family and paying them a wage where they can be reintroduced into their communities where they live.

Mr. WILLIAMS. I hate to interrupt you but let me say, but tax cuts certainly would help your workers and your companies a lot better than raising taxes and putting, again, the burden on taxpayers, would you not agree?

Mr. SHEDLOCK. My Members are following their collective bargaining agreements jointly with our signatory contractors.

Mr. WILLIAMS. But I am sure they would like more money in their pocket. I think they would. And thank you for answering that question.

Let me just come to you, Mr. Mortimer, being with the Chamber and so forth. And I am a Member of the Chamber and small business owner.

All the stuff we were talking about is great, but if we put the burden on small business owners and Chamber Members by raising taxes, instead of cutting taxes, frankly, and putting more money in their pocket that gets put out in the system, raising taxes right now with inflation like it is is not at a benefit, would you not agree?

Mr. MORTIMER. Yes, sir, Mr. Congressman. We appreciate, you know, you are a small business owner and you understand the Chamber has been supportive of the Tax Reform of 2017. We also have strongly opposed Build Back Better just for that reason. And so, you know, there are some that felt that a vote for this infrastructure bill was actually going to help Build Back Better. Well,

it has shown that supporting long-term investment is good for our country. Supporting short-term things such as Build Back Better are bad. And so, we are very happy that Congress has not moved forward with that part of the agenda.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you very much.

And Mr. Chairman, I will return my time to you.

Chairman GOLDEN. Thank you. I appreciate that.

I want to make sure I am not leaving people out.

Mr. Shedlock, you talked a little bit about the importance of putting money in people's pockets. Certainly, you see a lot in this bill that is going to increase work opportunities for laborers in Maine and New England. Important things that are going to see us with more Buy American, Made in America type of contract opportunities. In general, you think this law is going to generate more work and better pay opportunities for your workers. And when I say that, I also, of course, mean businesses that they work for. Could you talk a little bit more about the benefits?

Mr. SHEDLOCK. Sure, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the question.

Chairman GOLDEN. By the way, you touched on the importance of the laborer aspects, the laborer development aspects. I mean, in Maine, obviously, we have got to develop a skilled workforce for the future and maintain it. And really, at the end of the day that is one of the things that I think perhaps is going to be most significant about this bill. But I would love to hear a little bit more from the perspective of laborers and trades.

Mr. SHEDLOCK. Sure, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the question. And you hit it right on the head. We have an aging workforce in Maine and across the country in the construction industry. And one of the things that this piece of legislation is going to spur are registered apprenticeship programs. Mr. Mortimer spoke about them as well. They are the gold standard when it comes to training someone in the building trades with a set pathway and a paved road to the middle class. So as we partner with our small and midsize businesses to operationalize this piece of legislation, we have the opportunity to create a sustaining training module for these individuals but also, you know, it is not like when these infrastructure projects are built and we often say in the construction industry we work ourselves out of a job. It is our job to finish the work. It is not like the training that these individuals will receive due to the much needed investment that this piece of legislation injects into Maine and the state. After those projects are over, they are not just going to go home and, you know, I think Mr. Baker talked about being a greeter at Walmart. These are individuals who are now equipped with the tools that they need to pivot from those jobs into work in other areas across the state with the skills that they have learned because of this piece of legislation. And you know, what happens in Maine, as we say, you know, as Maine goes, so goes the country, what happens in Maine is not unique. This happens in jurisdictions all around the country when we bring folks into the fold. And as I said, and it should not be underestimated, women, people of color, veterans, traditionally underserved populations, we make a concerted effort to make sure that our unions' workforce looks like the communities in which they work.

So these are opportunities that are going to be immeasurable for working families in Maine and across the country.

Chairman GOLDEN. Yeah, I really appreciate the effort to hire veterans. I was coming out of the Marines back in '06. I was Infantry. That is all I ever wanted to do in the Marines. And as you know, I went to Afghanistan and Iraq. And coming home, I would have loved to have known about an opportunity to walk into an apprenticeship program and pick up some trade skills. So, I really admire and appreciate the effort of your organizations on that front, as well as for other important parts of our community, making sure people have access to get those skills, be successful is what it is all about. And I know it is important to the businesses. They would not be able to meet their workforce needs without groups like yours. So, I certainly appreciate that very much.

We stood under a bridge linking Maine to New Hampshire and heard directly from workers about the human aspect of this for people around the country. Some of the workers there, I think some of them laborers, some of them operating engineers, talked about how they had not had a job in Maine in years. And therefore, were sleeping in motels during the week away from their family, from their kids. And really what they saw in this Infrastructure Law, and you will remember, they were asking me to push back against the Speaker linking the infrastructure bill to Build Back Better which I fought real hard to get this infrastructure bill free. But for them it was about not just the paychecks and the skills development, but it was about work closer to home and going home to eat dinner and put the kid to bed; right? There is a real human aspect to this, too.

Mr. SHEDLOCK. There absolutely is. I appreciate you bringing that up, and it was a pleasure to partner with you on that event and so many others.

You know, we have talked a lot this morning about the price of gas; right? And, you know, no one can deny the price of gas is rising. What our Members do not appreciate, and partially to Congressman Williams's point, is to have to drive, and using that gas out of state to make a decent wage for a construction job. This is going to provide the opportunity for our Members, the women and men, the laborers and the entirety of the building trades unions, to work where they live. When that happens, not only do you not have to shell out more money from your pocket for a tank of gas or a motel room or, you know, many Members also sleep in their cars I have to tell you, you are also going to be spending money in your communities, but you are also going to be, you can go to church on Sunday in your community. You are going to coach, you know, I am a youth basketball coach in Portland and you are going to be able to coach your son or your daughter in the games. You are going to be productive Members of the communities visiting those small businesses that we all care so much about and who are the backbone of much of Maine.

Chairman GOLDEN. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Congressman Williams, I am going to ask one question to Mr. Baker, but I want to give you the opportunity if you want to ask any more questions of anyone.

Mr. WILLIAMS. No, I am good. I guess I would just say to everybody, you Maniacs got us Texans outnumbered on this call. But I would invite Mr. Shedlock and Mark, and of course, Ed knows this, and Terrance already brought it up, you all are invited to Texas. No personal income tax. All your people make more money. They are free to work for who they want to work for. So that invitation is out there, Chairman.

Chairman GOLDEN. Well, I appreciate that. Let me say, I had Pete Stauber up in Maine and I visited Minnesota with him and Jim Hagedorn actually back in 2019, and I would certainly—Van Taylor has been up to my district in Maine—and I intend to go to Texas and visit down there. And maybe we will have the opportunity to get together. It is a big state, like Maine, obviously, but——

Mr. WILLIAMS. My son-in-law, Mr. Chairman, is from Bangor.

Chairman GOLDEN. Oh, no kidding. There you go.

Mr. WILLIAMS. So you have got a great state. We just happen to be warmer than you are.

Chairman GOLDEN. Well, that is right. Obviously, I want to go to Texas right now, but you might want to Maine in the summertime. You know, but I want to learn a little bit about the economy down there when I visit and, of course, get down to the border if we can. Although, I have talked to the Border Patrol people up here in Maine and it is easy sometimes to forget about the northern border which is important, but they all rotate down south, too. So, I hear from them. But I look forward to that visit in the months ahead.

Mr. Baker, I wanted to tell you one thing. I know that you do not yourself drive trucks but certainly, that industry is at the heart of the business that you started as you were looking for the opportunity to start your own business and have a little bit more control over your life. One thing that we did in this bill I wanted to let you know about, I imagine you would be supportive and it gets a little bit at the, I think, trucker shortages. I do not know if you ever heard of the Drive Safe Act. So there were these laws where we had qualified truck drivers of a certain age, under 21 years old, who were only allowed to drive inside their state but not across state borders which created some really strange situations where we had qualified, certified drivers able to drive hundreds of miles across Maine—east, west, north, south—but could not deliver a load from one business in western Maine to a business in eastern New Hampshire just 30 minutes down the road. Did not make any sense. Also made it hard for them to get hired. And for some businesses who operate all over New England, made it hard for them at times to meet their workforce needs. So, the Drive Safe Act is going to create a new apprenticeship program for young CDL drivers. Make sure that there are new training opportunities. But also, it is going to allow those 18-to-21-year-olds to drive under the apprenticeship program across those state lines. In general, I do not know if that is something you have heard about in Minnesota, but I wanted you to know about it as you are having conversations with different trucking companies out there. It is a new opportunity.

Mr. BAKER. Yes, sir. I am aware of that. I am a CDL holder myself, so yes, thank you for that. Thank you for reminding me.

Chairman GOLDEN. Very good. Certainly, some things we can agree about. Looking back, just thinking about the inflation right now, about higher gas prices, I certainly believe actions can be taken to try and address that. I pushed the Biden administration to release some of the oil reserves to try and push down those prices, but I, too, have expressed frustration with political interference with things like the Dakota Pipeline 5. You may find that there may be laborers in America who agree about that and things like Keystone. So certainly, there are things that can be done.

Just looking back in 2009, I know that when Obama came into—the White House, we were pumping about 5.1 million barrels in January of 2009. By April, that was up to 8.9 million barrels a day. And in 2015, the U.S. pumped the most oil it had in 43 years. They were ranking like number three in crude oil globally and number one when you looked at both oil and gas. And prices dropped by half from 2014 to 2016 and '17. So certainly, there is something to be said for an opportunity to take some policy action here to address higher gas prices. And you pointed out some of the regulatory stuff which I agree with you about.

But some people in Congress have started talking about the need to address these high gas prices immediately. This would be a short-term fix, not a long-term one. But what do you think of conversations that have just started in the last couple days about a gas tax holiday for the remainder of 2022? Would that be beneficial to you as a business owner or just as a regular guy?

Mr. BAKER. Are you asking me, sir?

Chairman GOLDEN. Yes.

Mr. BAKER. Temporarily, sure. Any reduction in whatever kind of tax would temporarily help. But gee, just build the Keystone. Get the people back out on the site. Finish the Pipeline. Do it right. Do it PERMANENTLY.

Chairman GOLDEN. Certainly, if Pete Stauber were still here, he would agree with you about that.

Mr. Mortimer, go ahead.

Mr. MORTIMER. Yeah, Mr. Chairman, if I could jump in on that real quick because we do have a concern. There are some that are talking about temporarily appealing the gasoline tax. It is 18.4 cents. It has not been adjusted since 1993. It has lost almost 50 percent of its purchasing power. And in our view, we are talking about modernizing our infrastructure. Now is not the time to do that. There are a lot of other issues and I think Mr. Baker and others talked about some of the reasons that fuel prices are as high as they are. But from the Chamber's perspective, now is not the time to temporarily repeal the gas tax. We actually thought we should raise the user fee because these investments should be paid for. This bill did not get to that issue but it is something we still are urging the Congress to look at, that there is a reason that we have user-based systems for our roads and bridges.

Chairman GOLDEN. That is an interesting perspective.

Some people that have been talking about doing this gas tax holiday in 2022 for business owners or for individuals like Mr. Baker or Mr. Shedlock have talked about the importance of backfilling

that money into the Highway Trust Fund out of recognition of what you are talking about. But one thing that we looked at in the Problem Solvers Caucus in the House, and of course, this did not get into the bill as you said, it is not a perfect bill, is the overall long-term problem with our gas tax. We have electric vehicles now hitting the road. They are not paying enough of their fair share of our highway, road, bridge maintenance. So, I think we have got to also look at, you know, revisit how are we going to make sure that everyone is paying their fair share of maintaining our infrastructure and meeting our future infrastructure needs. And I am sure truck drivers and others would agree about that need. We cannot just make it all about the gas taxes. There is a diminishing return on that as we see more fuel-efficient vehicles which is what consumers are demanding.

I saw your hand go up, Mr. Williams.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Yeah, I think from a business standpoint, when you cut taxes that is a good thing. I think we would not have to talk about tax holidays and so forth from a gas tax if we just cut taxes. Let businesses have more of their money to invest and research and develop and hire people. It works. And of course, we are still in the Trump tax cuts right now but we need to cut taxes and do not nibble around the edges because everything is temporary unless you cut taxes and let businesses make money and invest money.

Chairman GOLDEN. Thank you.

Speaking of the 2017 Tax Cuts and then Build Back Better, of course, one thing I did not end up supporting which you know and some people agree with me, others not, I have raised concerns about inflation through 2021. But I also pointed out my concerns about proposals to do away with the SALT part of the 2017 Tax Law in part because I am looking in the years ahead with those individual tax cuts from the 2017 Tax Law are set to expire, SALT being one potential way to extend those tax cuts for working middle-class Americans. I think it expires at the end of 2025. Is that not right, Mr. Mortimer? But we are way off topic now.

I think there was one more point I wanted to make for Mr. Baker but now it has gone and slipped my mind. It was another thing you had mentioned that I thought would be helpful to you but perhaps it will come. Oh, on the EIDL loan, I am glad that the Committee staff was able to help you in getting that approved. And it is unacceptable it took as long as it did. That is part of the oversight role of the Committee, so I am glad you brought that forward as a concern to your representative and I hope you will continue to give us feedback on your relationship with the SBA as a business owner in the future. It is one of the things we love doing as Members is trying to make sure that our small business owners are getting well served by SBA. So glad you are getting that loan, which as you pointed out does have great rates, but what good is it if you cannot get it approved in a timely manner when you need it.

Mr. BAKER. Yes, sir. Thank you for that thought. I appreciate it. And I think I know every staffer and every loan officer at SBA now after a year of calling them weekly to try to inspire this to finally happen.

Chairman GOLDEN. I am very glad that that is moving forward. If it continues to take too long, reach back out. I am sure you will to Mr. Hagedorn.

Mr. BAKER. Thank you. Yes, sir.

Chairman GOLDEN. I want to thank all of our witnesses for being here today. Your testimony has really been helpful and shed light on many ways that small businesses will benefit from the law, the Infrastructure Law that is. And I can tell the excitement that the Chamber has, the Laborers have, small business owners like Mr. Ouellette has, and certainly, business owners like Mr. Baker are excited to benefit from those infrastructure investments on the ways it will help their business in the future. We also appreciate concerns raised by Mr. Baker and others about other issues, perhaps not focused on the Infrastructure Law today but welcome, nonetheless. We appreciate the time you have all taken to be here with us today.

Looking ahead, I think that this infrastructure investment, we have been wanting to do it for a number of years. When I first ran for Congress, I was watching Congress talk about it. I was pleased to see that it was bipartisan. I think it was more bipartisan than it even looked on paper in many ways. Time to process, not the best. I was one of the most vocal about that. But the product itself is going to have a big impact, a positive impact on the country. And I appreciate the Chamber, the laborers, the trades, and everyone out there that worked together to make it happen.

I want to ask unanimous consent that Members have 5 legislative days to submit statements and supporting materials for the record.

If there is no objection, we will consider that done.

And if there is no further business to come before the Committee, we will go ahead and call it adjourned. Thank you all very much. Take care.

[Whereupon, at 12:28 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Testimony of Ed Mortimer
Vice President, Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Small Business, Subcommittee on Underserved, Agricultural, and Rural Development
"The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's Benefits for Small Businesses"
February 15, 2022

Chairman Golden, Ranking Member Hagedorn, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for holding this important hearing.
My name is Ed Mortimer and I serve as Vice President of Transportation and Infrastructure at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

I also serve as the Executive Director of the Chamber-led, Americans for Transportation Mobility (ATM) coalition. Since 2000, this coalition that includes business, labor, and transportation stakeholders, has advocated for improved and increased federal investment in our aging, overburdened highway and transit systems. LiUNA is a founding member of the coalition.

The majority of the Chamber's members are small firms. In fact, approximately 96 percent of Chamber member companies have fewer than 100 employees and 75 percent have fewer than ten. Since our founding, the Chamber has advocated for policies that help businesses both large and small create jobs and grow our economy.

And, for more than two decades, we have been at the forefront of advocacy for investment in the modernization of America's aging infrastructure. We've led various coalitions of business leaders, labor, policymakers, and companies across industries to move forward this urgent and critical national priority.

We are grateful to Congress for the passage of the historic bipartisan Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA), that was recently signed into law by President Biden. This once-in-a-generation investment in our nation's infrastructure will help rebuild America's roads, bridges, and rails expand access to clean drinking water, ensure every American has access to high-speed internet, and so much more.

For many communities – whether minority, Appalachian, tribal, agricultural, or rural – the dream of an inclusive social and economic infrastructure is still not a reality.

The historic bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provides a unique opportunity to close gaps that exist in our nation's core infrastructure. The law includes $351 billion for highway programs and $91 billion for transit programs.

Another $55 billion is included to ensure that households, schools, daycare centers, and businesses have access to clean water. Critically, $15 billion is set aside specifically to replace lead water pipes, which literally bring poison through the tap. Lead water pipes happen to be most prominent in older, low-income, rural and underserved neighborhoods. The infusion of federal resources will help many of these communities complete the long-overdue and expensive upgrades that are essential for supporting local economic growth.

Through $65 billion through investments in broadband, we can close the digital divide that if unaddressed, will hold back rural and undserved communities from fully participating in the Internet economy. If we hope to close opportunity gaps for small businesses, we must do more than makeup for the lack of investment in the past; we must ensure that all communities and their small businesses have access to the infrastructure of the future. Few things are as important to education, job creation, and economic opportunity than access to high-speed broadband internet.

A few years ago, as part of our MetLife and U.S. Chamber Small Business Index research, we surveyed small businesses about infrastructure and leveraged what we learned to prioritize the need for infrastructure modernization[1]. We learned that a majority of small businesses rate high speed internet, local roads and bridges, cell phone networks, and highways as vital to the success of their company. At the same time however, most small business owners saw their local transportation infrastructure as average or poor in quality.

In terms of local infrastructure, small businesses prioritized local roads as needing the most improvement (69%) followed by highways (44%), bridges (30%) and mass transit (25%). Nationally, access to high-speed internet ranked as the highest priority for small businesses (64%) and these findings have remained consistent throughout our conversations with small business owners and chambers of commerce in the months following our survey work.

Another critical area that small businesses will benefit from with enactment of the IIJA is the modernization of project development. The law includes permitting provisions that substantially update the environmental permitting process for major infrastructure projects and other federal authorizations. The permitting provisions are called the "One Federal Decision" and will help improve agency coordination, encourage the development of more concise environmental analyses, and help drive more efficient decision-making. Bottom line, more investment will go to much needed projects while maintaining environmental projects and public input.

What can these investments mean to small business? Here are a few examples:

Karen Olson Beenken is the President and CEO of Blue Rock Companies, a beverage distributor in Northern Montana. She has long advocated for infrastructure modernization out of concern for the safety of her employees and the cost of maintenance of her 93-truck fleet. Beenken's employees drive an average of one million miles per year and the deteriorating conditions of our nation's roadways is a major safety concern.

Jim Jalbert is President and the owner of C&J Bus Lines in New Hampshire. He does everything possible to keep buses on schedule for his passengers, but congestion in and out of the Boston metro area has required additional buses on the route and more manpower in order to make sure the buses are leaving on time.

The Chamber also views implementation of the IIJA as an opportunity to ensure small businesses of all types can be part of the modernization effort as well as a beneficiary of these investments. Driven by data and informed by conversations with small business, government, academics, and civic leaders, the U.S. Chamber developed the Equality of Opportunity Initiative in 2020 to advance private and public sector solutions to help close race-based opportunity gaps in education, employment, entrepreneurship, criminal justice, health, and wealth.[2] We are very proud of the progress we've already made since launching the Equality of Opportunity Initiative – hosting 100s of events, meetings and briefings with companies and other organizations; endorsing several bills on Capitol Hill; releasing important research and data; sharing best practices across business and government; and standing up nearly a dozen Chamber-wide impactful partnerships and programs. In addition, over 500 state and local chambers and other groups have signed on to the Initiative and are advancing this work across their organizations and communities.

We will continue to work closely with our federal partners to include the Minority Business Development Agency, Small Business Administration and Export Import Bank to support and strengthen small businesses, create jobs, and develop thriving communities. And we are working diligently with the private sector to connect these enterprises to corporate supply chains and unleash the capital that they need to grow and succeed.

---

[1] *MetLife & U.S. Chamber of Commerce Small Business Index Q1 2019*, (March 6, 2019). https://www.metlife.com/content/dam/metlifecom/us/sustainability/pdf/Reports-and-statements/reports-and-research/metlife-and-us-chamber-of-commerce-small-business-index.pdf

[2] https://www.uschamber.com/equality-of-opportunity-initiative

One word of caution for the Subcommittee, to ensure the full benefits of the IIJA, Congress must promptly approve, and the President must sign a full, Fiscal Year 2022 Appropriations. Without a full year of appropriations, up to $15 billion of increased investment called for in the IIJA cannot take place. The critical needs of infrastructure investment are well-documented. Prompt passage of a full year appropriation will ensure the maximum benefits of the IIJA to the small business community.

We look forward to working with this Subcommittee and others within Congress and the Administration, to ensure that inclusive infrastructure investment becomes a reality in America. Working together -- business and government and across both sides of the aisle -- we can transform communities and small businesses, both economically and through improved quality of life, to ensure that all people have a real chance to live their American Dream.



Testimony

Mark Ouellette, CEO of Axiom Technologies, LLC.

Chairman Velázquez, Representative Golden - my Representative from the great State of Maine- and esteemed members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to speak to you today as a rural small business located in the "Downeast" Maine. Washington County, where my business is located, is called the Sunrise County, because we are the eastern most county in the United States and the first to see the sunrise. Our county is 3 times the size of Rhode Island with a population of only 33,000 people. Our County sits within the largest Congressional District east of the Mississippi. Its big and very rural.

Axiom is an Internet Service Provider based in Machias, the County seat and a small business with seven employees. We have been providing internet service to some of the most difficult to reach homes in all of the United States for over 18 years. During that time, it has sometimes been a struggle to keep the doors open, but we have persevered knowing that for much of our early years we were the only company willing to deliver an internet connection, to some of the most difficult to reach homes in rural Maine. Many of our original customers are still with us today. Over time we have invested in variety of technologies and now are deploying – almost exclusively- fiber optic internet, commonly called Broadband.

Our company has taken advantage of several programs that were passed by Congress during the early days of the pandemic. And I come before you today as a small business with 7 fulltime and two part-time employees. Not only has pandemic relief kept all my employees working, but the funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Job's Act earmarked for Broadband infrastructure investments- an amount estimated in Maine to be in the range of $250M will help me grow my business exponentially over the next two years, while also adding additional employees. We expect to grow from a $1M company to a $5M company as the Broadband funding is deployed. And importantly, expect to offer healthcare to our employees for the first time. Something I have been trying to achieve for years but could not afford it.

I do not think it can be overstated how big the economic impact of this bill will have on the Maine economy. Not only is my company adding jobs and growing but the work we do will bring Broadband to 1000s of rural Maine homes.

It is simply a game changer.

In Washington County and across rural Maine, we experience the Digital Divide every day- those that do not have access to reliable, speedy internet are at a disadvantage. And the pandemic has exposed how important it is to make sure children can access the internet, Zoom with there teachers and complete homework assignments while at the same time allowing parents to work remotely. But the impact of Broadband access go beyond that. They help elderly Mainer's age in place by accessing telemedicine opportunities. One example- when we were able to bring internet service to one homeowner, he told us is that by having an internet connection, he could avoid traveling 3 times a week to the nearest health facility- 45 minutes each way to download the information on his medical monitoring device. Residents of Cranberry Isles- year-round islanders living off the coast of Maine connected by ferry to the mainland- now have the ability to work remotely for companies anywhere. A Professor of Physics from the University of Arizona will be able to work from his home in Roque Bluffs when we hook him up to a fiber connection later this year- a community with a population of 303.

The bill also addresses affordability- a roadblock for rural families struggling to pay their bills. The benefits provided in the bill will allow qualified individuals to access a subsidy to bring down the cost of their monthly internet bill by $30- important to families struggling to make ends meet.

Internet access is critical to keeping rural places vibrant and ensuring that all Mainers can create their own economy.

The impact of the infrastructure bill in short will increase revenues at Axiom 5X, add employees and healthcare while providing world-class internet service to 1000s of homes that lack Broadband.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's Benefits for Small Businesses

The Committee on Small Business Subcommittee on Underserved, Agricultural, and Rural Development

Tuesday, February 15, 2022 | 11:00 AM

Testimony of Jason J. Shedlock: Regional Organizer, Laborers International Union, New England Region
President, Maine State Building & Construction Trades Council

Thank you Chairman Golden, Ranking Member Hagedorn, and Members of this subcommittee for this opportunity. My name is Jason J. Shedlock, and I sit before you today representing the Laborers' International Union of North America; 500,000 plus strong and united men and women, most of whom dedicate their lives to building our nation's infrastructure. More specifically, I'm one of over 300 members of the Laborers' Local 327 based in Augusta, Maine, as well as the President of the Maine State Building and Construction Trades Council; an organization consisting of 20 affiliated labor unions representing over 6,000 workers across the state.

I'm pleased to be with you today to share some thoughts on behalf of the individuals who will be operationalizing the generational landmark legislation that is the topic of this public hearing.

The bipartisan action that Congress took, and that President Biden signed into law, will have far-reaching impacts on current and future working families across Maine and the nation. Certainly a direct and immediate outcome of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act should and must be seen by the members of our union and those of the entirety of the building trades unions. These highly-skilled sisters and brothers will go to work, proudly building and rebuilding the very communities where they live, and doing it safely and efficiently while at the same time building and sustaining a middle class career for themselves and their families.

Tradespeople like the Laborers I represent stand ready, willing and able to heed the call of Congress and the President to fundamentally transform the totality of our nation's infrastructure. From initial groundbreaking to final delivery of a finished project, my fellow members build every sector of the construction industry: from city skyscrapers and subways, to state highways and bridges, from sidewalks to solar fields; we literally build America. Now if you've ever been to Maine, and I know the Chairman knows this well, you'll undoubtedly notice that we don't have skyscrapers per se or any subways in our state. That said, we are proud to be currently building the state's tallest building, located in the City of Portland; an 18-story high rise built by union Laborers, Operating Engineers, Iron Workers, Carpenters, Electricians, Elevator Constructors and more.

What this legislation means for Maine is finally and more fully addressing what the American Society of Civil Engineers calls a C- infrastructure system. Our state has 315 bridges and 1,438 miles of highway in poor condition, earning C- and D grades respectively. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will translate to, at a minimum, $1.3B for Maine's highways, $225M for bridge replacement, $100M for broadband, $390M for water infrastructure and $74M for our airports.

This represents a seismic change in our ability to invest in our state. What it also represents is the opportunity to make a seismic change in our workforce and our local economies. Through our top-notch training programs, members have constant access to emerging and cutting edge technologies that make them the best and most nimble in the business. Through our Registered Apprenticeship programs, we can ensure that the next generation of builders have the tools and skills necessary to secure their future with good pay, safe job sites, benefits for themselves and their families, and an even shot at retiring with dignity after an honest career. I'm proud to add that as the most diverse building trades union, the Laborers' also continuously focus on outreach to traditionally underrepresented populations such as women, people of color and veterans to ensure that our workforce adequately reflects the community where our members live, work, play and pray.

This Administration's dedication and determination to ensure that the jobs created by this massive infrastructure bill are good, high-road jobs is unprecedented. Whether it be the promotion of diverse workforces by requiring geographic diversity for job opportunities, or the implementation of labor standards through Davis-Bacon prevailing wages; local hiring and Buy America preferences or community stakeholder language; this law makes sure that it's not just about the quantity of jobs, but that it's also about the quality of careers.

To further amplify the law's effects on working families, the President's recent Executive Order mandating that all federally-funded projects of $35M or more be performed under a the gold standard of a Project Labor Agreement means that this investment will not only equate to better infrastructure for every end-user, but also it will translate to the surety of safety and respect for construction workers and our signatory contractors in communities across America.

We must also not ignore the environment in which this law will be implemented. At the center of our collective success and effectiveness is the worsening job crunch in Maine and the country. No one feels this crunch harder than small businesses - including small and medium-sized construction contractors. By partnering with the Laborers union and our fellow trades, we in essence provide these businesses with an "easy button" as they can gain access to our highly-skilled construction workforce while at the same time enjoying the benefits of increased bidding and job opportunities related to this historic infrastructure investment.

Continuing on the trend of collaboration with the business community, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge and appreciate the Laborers' close working relationship with the US as well as regional and local Chambers of Commerce across America with respect to our

nation's infrastructure. We know that it's only by joining together with our partners in the business community that we will most effectively deliver on the tremendous promise of this legislation.

The targeted investment into our communities also has multiplier effects. Not only are many of our contracting partners in Maine who will benefit from this investment considered small businesses, we know that when workers are compensated fairly, their purchasing power at home is positively impacted. This means that workers will reinvest their earnings into their local economies, often supporting Main Street by powering the economic engines that drive our nation.

Another benefit that bears exploring is that with this investment and the subsequent engagement with construction unions to meet the law's goals, we can do our part to address the unacceptable reality of the gender pay gap in America. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, while overall, women earn 81.1 percent of what men earn; in the construction industry, that number increases to 99.1 percent. Further, according to the National Women's Law Center, unionized women earn 24 percent more than women who are not represented by a union. By working with America's building trades unions, we have the opportunity to do right by our sisters in the trades and further facilitate the economic empowerment of women in the construction industry.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Hagedorn and fellow members, the takeaway here for the entire industry and our communities is very simple and summed up well by my General President, Terry O'Sullivan, upon the bill's signing, "The investment will put Laborers to work in every community, revitalize our nation's economy, and open doors to the middle class for hundreds of thousands of working men and women."

Of course there is much more to discuss about the benefits that the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will have on workers, traditionally underrepresented populations, local economies and small businesses, but one thing is abundantly clear; through working with America's building trades unions, we can safely and effectively build and rebuild our nation, solidify and expand our middle class, and inject the life and vitality into America's local economies that is so desperately needed.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. As any good Laborer, I and my union stand ready to assist you in any way necessary as we work together to put this legislation into action; from groundbreaking to final delivery.

T. L. BAKER
Pilot Car Escort Services

Terrance Baker

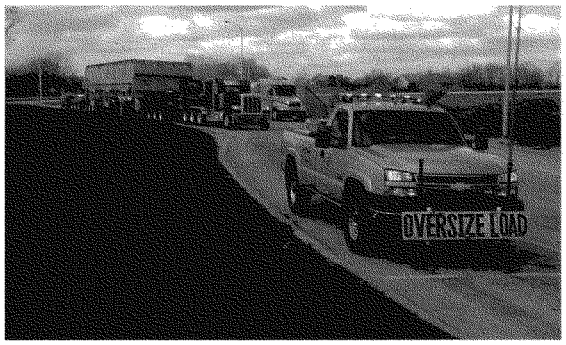
Owner / Operator & Sole Proprietor

Testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Small Business Subcommittee on Underserved, Agricultural, and Rural Development

Hearing Entitled:

"The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's Benefits for Small Businesses"

Tuesday, February 15, 2022



Thank You Chairwoman Velázquez and Ranking Member Luetkemeyer, I'll start by also expressing my gratitude to Representative Jim Hagedorn and His Office Staff, for all that They do for our Minnesota Congressional District, and Our Nation, and for making my appearance here today possible.

My background and biography have been shared with the Committee via emails, the most significant of which I consider to be my service as an active U.S. Navy Reservist 1973 – 1977, along with my service in the regular U. S. Navy as a Surface Warfare Officer 1977 – 1992.

A ***Pilot Car***, also known as an **escort vehicle**, is **any vehicle used to help guide and support convoys of one or more large trucks**. Typically, a Semi-Truck carrying an over-dimensional load must be accompanied by one or more pilot cars if the load is more than: 12 feet wide; and/or 14 1/2 feet high, exceeds 90 to 100 ft in length, and/or weighs more than 80,000 pounds. In many states, if the width is 14 feet **or more** wide, two pilot cars are required, one leading and one following. The primary purpose is to warn the public of the presence of the potential DANGER of this Oversize Load due to its dimensions and inability to maneuver. The lead Pilot Car will maintain the Load on a specific State DOT permitted route, whereas the chase (following) Pilot Car will control and clear lanes of traffic as the need arises to maneuver or negotiate corners. Depending on load and trailer configuration, the Chase Car may also STEER the rear axles of the trailer to assist in clearing obstacles while turning corners.

In 2010 to follow my desire to become more flexible, self-employed and independent, I purchased a pick-up and started a Pilot Car operation. On a small scale with one vehicle and no employees, operating costs were reasonable, certification was simple, most states had straightforward regulations, and diesel duel was cheap enough. I certified as a Pilot Car Operator with Utah DOT as it had the most reciprocity with 47 other states. The exception was New York, where I also became certified.

Running escort jobs the next few years through most of the Continental U.S.A., Canada, and Québec was reasonably successful. I built a reliable customer base with several major heavy haul trucking companies, built a great reputation and references, and had all of the work that I ever wanted. My main customers were Lone Star Transportation out of Fort Worth, TX and Southern Tier Express out of Andover, NY. Most of the service I performed was that of a Chase Car / Steerman. As such, I was a specialized trailer operator directly assisting the Load Driver in the assembly, loading, unloading, disassembly, and steering the trailer around obstacles when in the loaded configuration.

Notably during 2010 – 2016 I encountered rising fuel prices because of Washington's "climate initiatives" and the punishing regulations on the petroleum industry. Budgeting and net profits were difficult. 2017 – 2020 saw a huge improvement as energy was de-regulated, domestic oil production made us energy independent, and fuel prices became affordable.

2020 promised to be a great year until the Covid Panic hit in March. Mask mandates, vaccine mandates, social distancing rules and general flu hysteria shut down the heavy haul trucking industry and work went to zero. Restaurants, motels, hotels, truck stops…essential SUPPORT activities that I need for my job and travel…were mostly shut down. Work stopped and my Income stopped.

Further complicating the Covid disaster, the Governor of my state has imposed California Air Standards on Minnesota. Impact? Sometime in the future I will not be able to renew the MN registration as my pick-up does not meet CA air standards!

Additionally, Minnesota is now requiring that Pilot Cars based in Minnesota take a Minnesota Pilot Car certification course, and other state certifications are no longer honored! More time and expense.

In January 2021, the new administrator of the SBA publicized money and support available to small businesses…. Loans up to $500,000 were available at 3.75% with a pay back period of 30 years!!! Really excellent terms! The Minnesota District Office of the SBA still advertises this availability today under the so-called "Money Smart" program.

So, acting on my URGENCIES to comply with new and more onerous DOT and EPA Requirements, I applied for a Loan from SBA **over ONE YEAR AGO**. During this period, I have complied with multiple

repetitive demands from SBA for my Tax Returns and resubmissions of Form 4605-T (Tax Transcript request from IRS). **SBA has not yet processed my loan!!!**

So now I am facing an additional needed re-investment of conservatively $40,000 with or without assistance from SBA. In order to remain in business, I will soon be required to retro-fit my pick-up with CA emissions equipment, buy a new CA emissions compliant vehicle, or move out of state!

The **CPI (Consumer Price Index)** last month was 7%. CPI this month reported on Thursday, February 10, is 7.5%!!! Both 40-year highs. These numbers are pure fantasy! The actual increases are much higher: The Crude Oil price on January 20, 2021 was $49.74. Today it is $94.00. In December 2020 I could buy diesel from the local CENEX at 2.08⁹ per gallon. Now it is 3.89⁹!!! Skim Milk one year ago at Aldi's was $1.80 per gallon, no it is $3.90!!! All groceries in general have increased in price 20% to 40% over the last year. There are a multitude more too numerous to list here.

In order for Me to remain in business and remain profitable, I MUST pass these price increases on to my few remaining customers…. As I am discovering, **THEY WON'T PAY IT!!!**

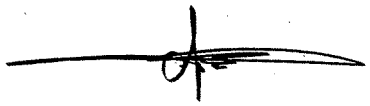
This Administration could instantly fix the Inflation and Cost of Living Crisis by reopening Domestic Oil Production. Instead of pursuing nefarious "climate initiatives" that benefit no one, the Administration needs to refocus on restoring the Nation's economy and prosperity by completing the Keystone XL pipelines, stopping restrictions on other pipelines (Dakota Access), and reopening federal lands to oil & natural gas expansion. Make Energy Affordable again and You will stop inflation without market-crippling interest rate hikes. When will Washington ever learn that the cost basis of everything (Goods, Services, Housing, Food, Transport) is ENERGY???

This Administration's failed policies are fomenting Fear, Resentment, and Hatred towards Washington. This Country will not allow itself to be driven into poverty and destitution. Take Canada's Trucker Strike as a fair warning!

Thank You for Reading / Listening

Respectfully

Terrance L. Baker

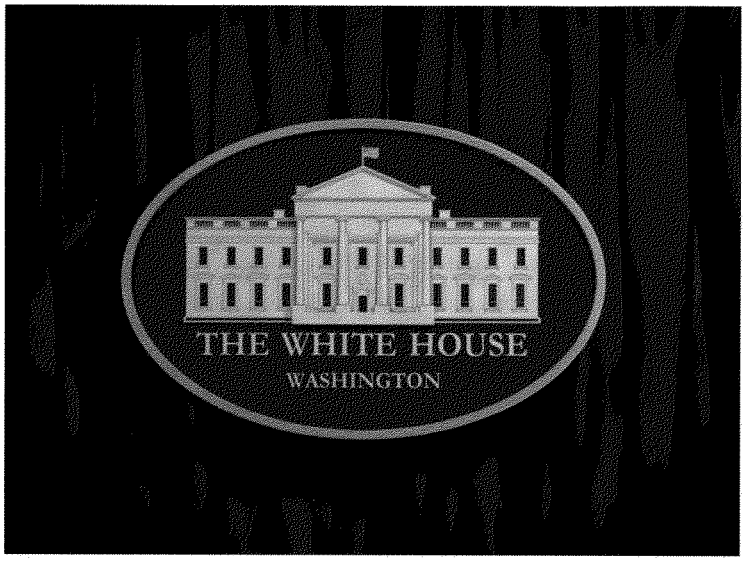


Job Creators Network

9 ways Biden's feckless cabinet members are contributing to our country's problems

Biden's cabinet has largely avoided criticism by hiding for cover behind their boss

OP-ED / APPEARED IN FOX NEWS ON FEBRUARY 8, 2022 / BY ALFREDO ORTIZ



Last week, the Washington Post reported that senior White House officials are unhappy with Xavier Becerra, Secretary of Health and Human Services, over his mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have reportedly "openly mused" about his replacement. "He hasn't showed up," Eric Topol, a leading COVID analyst, told the Post. He's been "like a ghost."

Biden's cabinet has largely avoided criticism by hiding for cover behind their boss, who has deservedly been the target for America's economic decline.

Yet Becerra is far from the only top administration official who's floundered. Examining the entire cabinet, it's clear — like at the supermarket — the shelves are empty.

Here are eight other feckless cabinet members contributing to the country's problems:

1.Vice President Kamala Harris, whom Newt Gingrich claimed (https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A___www.foxnews.com_media_newt-2Dgingrich-2Dkamala-2Dharris-2Dworst-2Dvice-2Dpresident-2Damerican-2Dhistory&d=DwMFAg&c=euGZstcaTDllvimEN8b7jXrwqOf-v5A_CdpgnVfiiMM&r=kUUgyyEV2SvFHr5qpgCYmPd_ciwpMjMibMYtrcxM-dMpVcUH7z-wGwjkIwWeefpd&m=qGsch95gsBQeMklbXf20tlXP6ZnFAMBXyz-VEDyxc2Y&s=TkddcNVzzJKpnK13tL-YEeFhIv8ni0DnQvkK3IRv24Q&e=) is probably the worst VP in history, was tasked (https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A___apnews.com_article_voting-2Drights-2Djoe-2Dbiden-2Dkamala-2Dharris-2Djen-2Dpsaki-2Dvoting-2Dd6e38ab9c44b9f7f34cdfe1a7ecbac0a&d=DwMFAw&c=uw6TLu4hwhHdiGJOgwcWD4AjKQx6zvFcGEsbfiY9-EI&r=WKaH1vFYj7fnFkioUplDf7eyhgA7RmadhwSCcSrc0RM&m=NmvAboMm5AaPEGmoTXrw3In4KpYpv8qLyhy-oFWEyu9Tq0TH2Ni5kCyPgGMztNPQ&s=jSXOhdFGBR8ByCjl_p3g1Z_R2coHTYIYZohBZTCRCOU&e=) by President Biden to enact national voter reform. Her role in this partisan effort has been little more than making hyperbolic statements about commonsense voting reforms that make it easy to vote but hard to cheat. In December, Harris ridiculously claimed (https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A___nypost.com_2021_12_26_kamala-2Dharris-2Dsays-2Ddemocracy-2Dbiggest-2Dnational-2Dsecurity-2Dthreat_&d=DwMFAw&c=uw6TLu4hwhHdiGJOgwcWD4AjKQx6zvFcGEsbfiY9-EI&r=WKaH1vFYj7fnFkioUplDf7eyhgA7RmadhwSCcSrc0RM&m=NmvAboMm5AaPEGmoTXrw3In4KpYpv8qLyhy-oFWEyu9Tq0TH2Ni5kCyPgGMztNPQ&s=HEEkv6d1B9DenO5NwexwCsaprk7mcZw21_dSv8_MirA&e=) "our democracy" is the biggest threat to national security. She has faced the desertion of her staff, who told (https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A___www.washingtonpost.com_politics_2021_12_04_kamala-2Dharris-2Dstaff-2Ddepartures_&d=DwMFAw&c=uw6TLu4hwhHdiGJOgwcWD4AjKQx6zvFcGEsbfiY9-

EI&r=WKaH1vFYj7fnFkioUplDf7eyhgA7RmadhwSCcSrc0RM&m=NmvAboMm5AaPEGmoTXrw3In4KpYpv8qLyhy-oFWEyu9TqoTH2Ni5kCyPgGMztNPQ&s=YfH5oZgW-rP8FEX6y3NtEDrPd-vbLpGe2xxXPYv89HE&e=) the Post that she was not willing to put in the work needed and bullied her aides for her lack of preparedness.

2. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and Harris have failed to secure the southern border from illegal immigrants with criminal records, many of whom are being released into the country by Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

3. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg has presided over the country's botched 5G rollout, which one prominent airline executive slammed as "delinquent and utterly irresponsible." During the worst supply-chain crunch in modern American history, Pete went AWOL, taking two months of paternity leave. Americans still can't get regular access to products. Small businesses, which lack economies of scale, long-term contracts, and preferential purchasing agreements, have been especially impacted. Cargo ships have been stuck off the coast of Los Angeles for months, and Pete has no solid plan to alleviate the logjam. Pete is reportedly deploying speed-trap cameras across the nation so drivers will begin getting unknown speeding tickets in the mail — the last thing Americans need right now.

4. Attorney General Merrick Garland continues to remind us why Sen. Mitch McConnell was right to block his nomination to the Supreme Court in 2016. Garland and Biden visited New York City last week to discuss skyrocketing gun crime under Garland's watch. Instead of stemming the massive increase in crime in cities across the country, Garland has gone after concerned parents who have protested anti-science school policies such as the failed Zoom school experiment. He's also turned a blind eye to left-wing district attorneys refusing to prosecute widespread shoplifting that's burdening small businesses.

5. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has presided over painful inflation that is resulting in falling real wages and living standards for ordinary Americans. Her response: Call for more of the same reckless spending that's fueled inflation in the first place. For instance, Yellen claims the $5 trillion Build Back Better legislation can alleviate inflation. Like her Keynesian counterparts, she's been caught utterly flatfooted by today's entirely predictable inflation. As late as October, she said inflation was temporary.

6. Labor Secretary Marty Walsh is so committed to his job that he reportedly hasn't even made the move to Washington. He's presided over a slow jobs recovery; there are still nearly 3 million fewer jobs today than before the pandemic. His response to the biggest labor shortage in modern history is to support policies that would exacerbate it, including the

Labor Department's employer vaccine mandate that the Supreme Court recently stopped in response to a legal challenge by Job Creators Network and other groups. He supports the renomination of former Labor Department apparatchik David Weil, one of the most anti-small business bureaucrats in American history, who's waged war on independent contractors, gig workers, and franchises.

7. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona hasn't stood up to teachers union demands to continually close districts to in-person learning despite the well-documented harms to students, especially minorities. Emails suggest he requested the National School Boards Association letter comparing parents to terrorists that was the precursor for Merrick Garland's letter and Justice Department action.

8. Small Business Administration Administrator Isabel Guzman has been slammed by small businesses for her agency's nonresponsive, bureaucratic, and ineffective responses during this historically challenging period. Deputy Mark Madrid refused to answer even basic questions before Congress about how Biden's proposed tax increases would affect small businesses.

Biden and his bad agenda are responsible for America's economic stagnation. Yet his cabinet members contribute to the problems Americans face by pursuing counterproductive and distracting priorities.