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CHAIRMAN

July 12, 2004

The Honorable Don Young
2111 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Young: Don!

As you work with your Senate counterparts toward a compromise of the six-year surface transportation bill, I urge you to support the Senate-passed investment level – the minimum necessary to address the nation's overwhelming transportation infrastructure needs.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation's 2002 Conditions and Performance Report, our country needs an average annual investment of $116 billion (constant 2004 dollars) over the next twenty years by all levels of government to improve road conditions. Based on this report, an annual federal investment of $62 billion is necessary to address our nation's transportation infrastructure needs.

The Senate's nearly $319 billion proposal would help meet that critical investment level by providing the funding necessary for federal surface transportation authorizations over the next six years -- slightly above the $284 billion House-passed bill. I believe the Senate's proposed level of investment will create millions of American jobs and is necessary to enhance the security and quality of life for all Americans and improve the nation's economic productivity. Additionally, a six-year $318.9 billion investment would generate these quantifiable, real-world benefits without raising fuel taxes.

Enacting a six-year TEA-21 reauthorization measure with investment levels below $318.9 billion could preclude or seriously dilute the potential benefits to be gained from enactment of a well-funded transportation reauthorization bill. Our message to America should be that we rejected the status quo and made good on this opportunity to improve the future of our national transportation network so important to everyday life across the country.

I understand the obligation of the Congress to be frugal in spending the people's money. But history has shown us that one of the most responsible investments we can make is in our nation's transportation system.

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In 1956, the 84th Congress passed and President Eisenhower signed into law the Federal Aid Highway Act to promote and invest in the interstate highway system. That landmark law was enacted even though our debt as a percentage of our gross national product was far higher than it is today (see attachment). The law created jobs, stimulated the economy and led to new revenues that reduced our nation's overall debt.

Nearly 50 years later, we must follow that same vision and courage and once again provide America with a strong national highway system. Join me in supporting the Senate proposal as the starting point to the negotiations to this vital legislation.

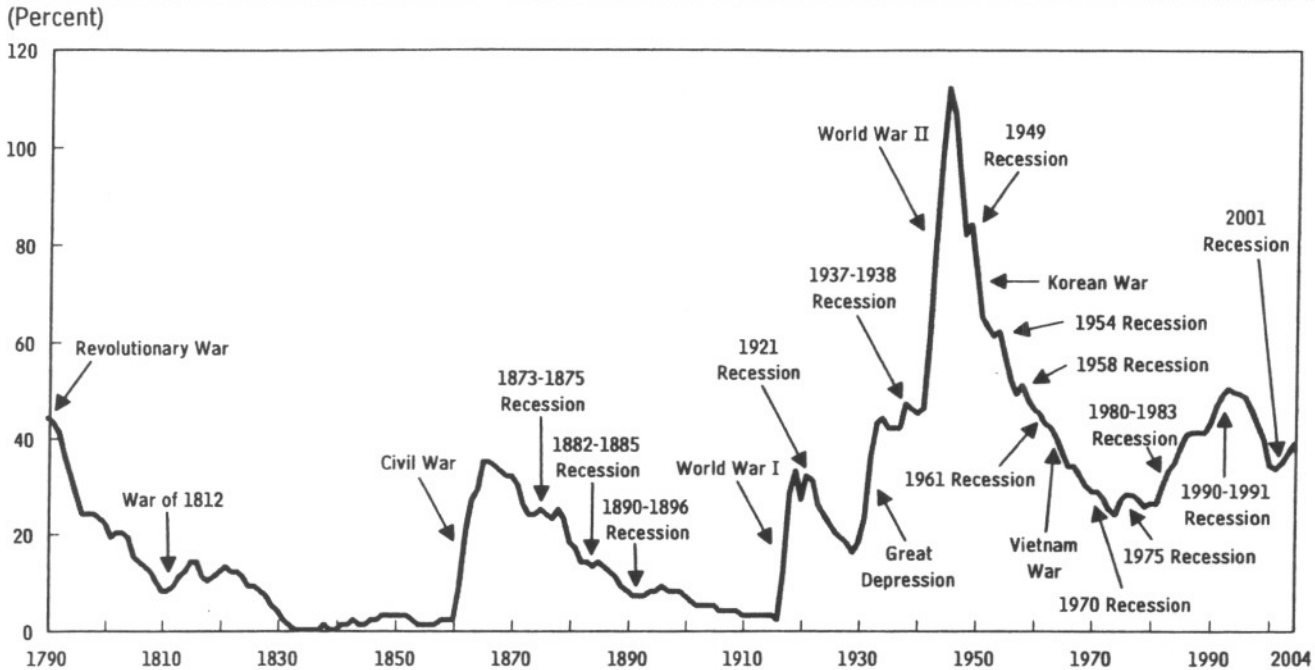
All the best,

Rob Simmons
Member of Congress
Second District, Connecticut

cc: Speaker of the House J. Dennis Hastert
Majority Leader Tom DeLay
Majority Whip Roy Blunt

Figure 1.

U.S. Federal Debt Held by the Public as a Percentage of Gross National Product, 1790-2004



Source: Congressional Budget Office; Department of Commerce; Bureau of Economic Analysis; Department of the Treasury.

Notes: This figure compares debt with gross national product (GNP) rather than with the more familiar gross domestic product (GDP) because GNP is the measure used in the historical data. GNP measures the total income of all U.S. residents (including net payments for capital and labor income earned in other countries). GDP measures the income produced on U.S. soil. The difference between the two was about $30 billion in 2003.

The concept of GNP has changed over the years, so the ratio of debt to GNP calculated in recent years is not strictly comparable with the ratio calculated in previous years.

The value for 2004 is projected.