

Six-year highway bill may pass by Thanksgiving

(Editor's note: The following are Sen. Jim Inhofe's remarks on Senate floor regarding the importance of long-term highway funding.)

As you've heard me say before, my top priority as Chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee has been and continues to be passing a long-term highway reauthorization bill. Since the expiration of SAFETEA-LU in 2009, Congress has resorted to passing short-term extension after short-term extension just to keep the highway program in operation.

As a result, industry, stakeholders, and local government leaders have lost faith in Congress's ability to provide funding certainty to maintain and advance our surface transportation infrastructure.

Ranking Member Barbara Boxer and I have been fighting to change this and reverse the trend of wasteful short-term patches.

On June 24, our committee unanimously voted to advance the DRIVE Act, a 6-year reauthorization bill, to the Senate.

In July, the Senate gave strong bipartisan support — by a vote of 65 to 34 — for the DRIVE Act, which also included contributions from the Senate Commerce Committee and Senate Banking Committee.

The Senate worked hard and across party lines to put forward a

SEN. JIM INHOFE

solution for our nation's roads and bridges. We ended the summer by passing yet another short-term patch in order to give more time for the House to join our efforts.

Unfortunately, we are now three days away from facing another cliff, and the two Chambers have not yet been able to conference a long-term transportation solution.

However, Chairman Bud Shuster and the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee marked up a 6-year reauthorization bill last Thursday. I am proud to see that both chambers are on similar pages.

Both bills: recognize the need for a national freight program, further environmental streamlining, place a new focus on innovation, provide states with flexibility, and most importantly, both bills provide necessary long-term certainty.

We are now one step closer to putting America back on the map as the best place to do business.

It is my understanding that the House intends to move Chairman Shuster's 6-year reauthorization bill through the full House over the next two weeks.

Unlike in years past, I expect a very short conference period. And because we still face this important

process, Congress will need one more extension to get us to the finish line.

I realize there are many moving discussions on larger deals on Debt Limit and budget caps. However, there is agreement that the Surface Transportation Bill can and will move on its own timeline.

The House will move a short-term extension to November 20 this week, and I hope the Senate passes it quickly so the House can move the T&I reported bill on the floor and we can move to a quickly resolved conference.

Due to the similarity in both of our bills, I am confident Congress can — and should — have a bill on the president's desk by Thanksgiving.

If we fail to get this done by Nov. 20, we will be faced with two new, significant hurdles.

First, Congress has other very pressing deadlines to address in December to include: Dec. 11, when legislation funding the federal government expires; Dec. 31, when a host of important tax provisions expire; and another Dec. 31 deadline, when provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act — which the president vetoed — will expire, provisions such as enlistment bonuses for our all-volunteer force.

Addressing these deadlines will require Congress' undivided atten-

tion. Some of the solutions for these bills could also result, I fear, in Members attempting to siphon off the pay forms in the DRIVE Act.

The second significant hurdle we face is that later this year, the Highway Trust Fund will drop to a dangerously low level, as DOT Sec. Foxx has warned.

At that point, agencies at the federal and state level will begin to implement cash management procedures that significantly affect the State's construction seasons.

Mark my words — a failure for Congress to enact a long-term bill by Thanksgiving will result in a lost 2016 construction season. Congress will return to its current pattern of short-term extensions and continue to kick the can down the road for the unforeseeable future and to the detriment of our country's economy.

This is a terrible outcome that must be avoided at all cost.

By making industry and states continue to hold their breath and budgets, we rob taxpayers of cost-efficient project planning and continue to stall on launching major economy-boosting projects.

Just look at my state of Oklahoma, which lost \$63 million in construction dollars over the past few years as a direct result of inefficiency and contracting uncertainty

that comes from short-term extensions.

When Congress passes short-term extensions, we lose 30 percent off the top. This is why the conservative position is to pass long-term bills.

With a fully-funded, long-term reauthorization, Oklahoma would actually see a savings of \$122 million and millions more in efficiency savings from long-term commitments and early completion savings from contractors.

I have no doubt if you ask your states' industry and government leaders, they will share the same experience.

It's time Congress fulfills its constitutional duty to fund our roads and bridges. Americans demand it, and our economy depends on it.

As I stated earlier, I am confident that the Senate and House will work together to get this bill to the President's desk within the next few weeks.

I wish my counterpart on the House side, Chairman Shuster, the best of luck moving forward. I look forward to working with him in conference and to sending the President legislation that will advance our economy and help to bring jobs back to America.

Jim Inhofe, R-Tulsa, is Oklahoma's senior U.S. Senator.

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EDITORIAL

Govt. regulating away low-priced vehicles

"Would you be interested in a brand-new, fully warranted, five-door crossover SUV built by a major, name-brand automaker that gave you 50-plus MPG with a gas (not diesel or hybrid) engine, that has a top speed around 125 mph, is capable of getting to 60 in 12 seconds (about the same as a Prius hybrid) that stickered for less than \$5,000?"

So begins an intriguing post by Eric Peters, who writes about two important subjects — liberty and cars — in his EricPetersAutos.com blog. The vehicle in question is the Renault Kwid, which is roughly comparable to the Nissan Juke or Kia Soul.

But, like the Suzuki Alto 800 and the Hyundai Eon, which similarly have base models with a sticker price in the sub-\$5,000 range, the Kwid is not available for sale in the United States.

The reason? Unnecessary safety and environmental standards.

The Kwid, for example, just has one airbag for the driver, not the dual front airbags mandated by the government (and, in practice, even more airbags are often needed to achieve high scores on increasingly stringent government crash tests). Nonetheless, it is still likely safer than, say, a SmartCar or others that do have the federal stamp of approval.

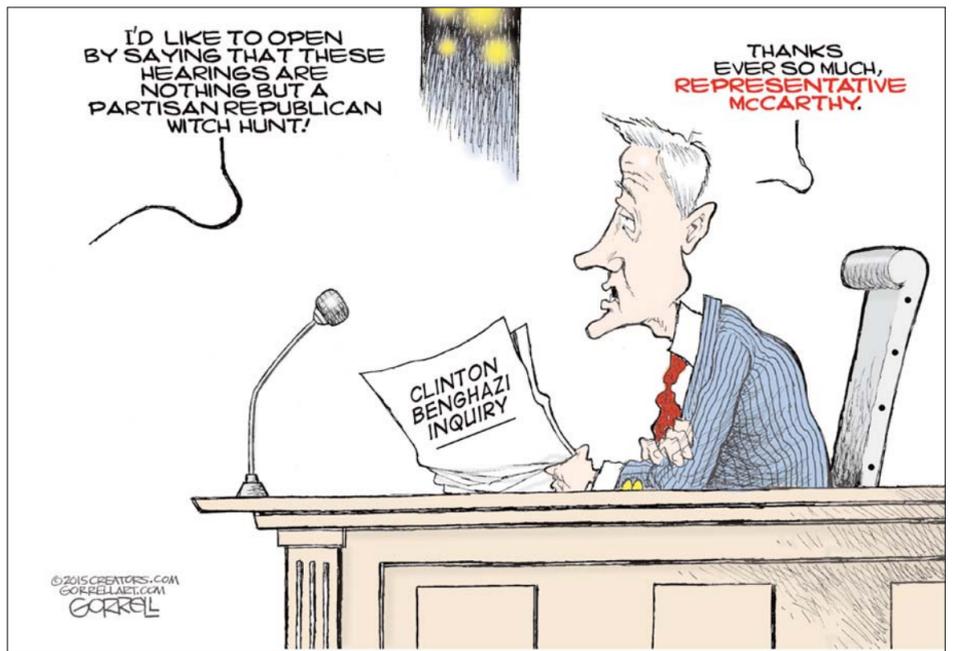
Consumers should be able to choose their own standards of safety. After all, we can still drive older cars that predate certain safety standards. And some people choose to ride motorcycles, which are far more dangerous than even the cars of yesteryear.

As for environmental regulations, emissions standards "ceased being reasonable back in the '90s," Peters says. For years, exhaust emissions have been at least 97 percent "clean," so additional requirements merely pursue the remaining 3 percent or less — often at great cost.

Autos like the Kwid, Eon and Alto "show us what we could have — were it not for the effrontery (and cupidity) of the government (and the car cartels) who now work together to shear us like sheep, while telling us it's all for our own good, to keep us 'safe,'" Peters contends.

As these value vehicles reveal, government mandates cost consumers thousands of dollars — not to mention the higher repair and insurance costs — for, at best, marginal improvements in safety and environmental quality. These regulations should be repealed so that consumers, not bureaucrats, can decide for themselves which features are worth the price.

— The Orange County Register



TODAY'S ALMANAC

Today is Wednesday, Oct. 28, the 301st day of 2015. There are 64 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 28, 1965, Pope Paul VI issued a Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions which, among other things, absolved Jews of collective guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

On this date:

In 1636, the General Court of Massachusetts passed a legislative act establishing Harvard College.

In 1776, the Battle of White Plains was fought during the Revolutionary War, resulting in a limited British victory.

In 1886, the Statue of Liberty, a gift from the people of France, was dedicated in New York Harbor by President Grover Cleveland.

In 1914, Yugoslav nationalist Gavrilo Princip, whose assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and Sophie, Duchess of

Hohenberg, sparked World War I, was sentenced in Sarajevo to 20 years' imprisonment. (He died in 1918.)

In 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt rededicated the Statue of Liberty on its 50th anniversary.

In 1940, Italy invaded Greece during World War II.

In 1958, the Roman Catholic patriarch of Venice, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, was elected Pope; he took the name John XXIII. The Samuel Beckett play "Krapp's Last Tape" premiered in London.

In 1962, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev informed the United States that he had ordered the dismantling of missile bases in Cuba; in return, the U.S. secretly agreed to remove nuclear missiles from U.S. installations in Turkey.

In 1964, the "T.A.M.I. Show," a two-day rock concert filmed for theatrical release, opened in Santa Monica, California.

In 1976, former Nixon aide John D. Ehrlichman entered a federal

prison camp in Safford, Arizona, to begin serving his sentence for Watergate-related convictions (he was released in April 1978).

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter and Republican presidential nominee Ronald Reagan faced off in a nationally broadcast, 90-minute debate in Cleveland.

In 1991, what became known as "The Perfect Storm" began forming hundreds of miles east of Nova Scotia; lost at sea during the storm were the six crew members of the Andrea Gail, a swordfishing boat from Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Ten years ago: Vice President Dick Cheney's top adviser, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, resigned after he was indicted on charges of obstructing a grand jury investigation and lying about his actions that blew the CIA cover of an Iraq war critic's wife. (Libby was convicted of most of the counts brought against him, but had his 30-month prison sentence commuted by President George W. Bush.)

Congress still in search of the truth on Benghazi

More than three years after our nation learned about the tragedy at our consulate in Benghazi, Libya, there are still unanswered questions about what happened there and what could have prevented the murder of four Americans on the twelfth anniversary of Sept. 11. Since that terrible day that claimed the lives of Ambassador Christopher Stevens, Sean Smith, Glen Doherty and Tyrone Woods, we have sought to find out the truth about Benghazi. No matter how much time has passed, we owe it to the families of those lost to find out exactly what happened and who should be held accountable for any wrongdoing or failure to take appropriate actions before and during the attack.

While Obama administration officials claimed that the tragedy stemmed from a spontaneous protest in response to an anti-Muslim YouTube video, evidence later pointed to a planned terrorist attack by Ansar al-Sharia — a group directly connected to Islamic terrorists. Even though the State Department almost immediately knew about this connection, the Obama administration chose to misinform and mislead the American people by blaming the video days and weeks after the fact. Because this transpired weeks ahead of the 2012 presidential election, it rightly caused strong suspicion of political cover-up and has led to several investigations.

In May 2014, Speaker John Boehner recommended and the House passed legislation to establish the Select Committee on Benghazi to further investigate the events surrounding the attack on our consulate. Before formation

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of the select committee, five House committees held jurisdiction over various areas related to the investigation. The establishment of the select committee streamlined the process by providing subpoena power over all relevant information and key witnesses. Unlike previous investigations, the select committee has considered emails from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Ambassador Christopher Stevens, relevant documents from the White House, Department of Defense, Department of Justice and Central Intelligence Agency as well as accounts from several eyewitnesses.

Chaired by former prosecutor Trey Gowdy, the select committee has lost no time in getting to the bottom of the situation and demanding answers. Unfortunately, the select committee's work has been stalled along the way due to slow and limited cooperation from

the Obama administration in turning over the relevant documents and emails related to Benghazi, including those emails sent by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. In fact, the select committee still awaits receipt of all the documents it has requested from the State Department.

In recent news related to the work of the select committee, Secretary Clinton testified during a public hearing and discussed her role during Benghazi, answered questions about her emails and explained what she knew in the hours, days and weeks after the attack. Out of the most disturbing takeaways from the daylong hearing was the documented evidence that Clinton knew she was untruthful to the American people about the cause of the attack.

In an email to her daughter on the night of the attack in Benghazi, she made no mention of a video and instead said she believed "an al Qaeda-like group" had attacked the consulate. This contradicted her public statement from the State Department made just about hour before that email was sent. And the very next day, while visiting with the Egyptian Prime Minister Hesham Kandil, Clinton was recorded in a State Department memo as saying

"We know that the attack in Libya had nothing to do with the film. It was a planned attack — not a protest." So despite her knowledge of what actually happened, she still deliberately chose to deceive — something we suspected all along and now unfortunately have hard evidence to support.

As Ambassador Stevens and consulate

staff watched a worsening security situation in the days and months leading up to the attack, the select committee hearing last week revealed that the State Department had received more than 600 requests for additional security at the Benghazi consulate. Clinton admitted during the hearing that none of those requests had even reached her desk. Considering that we had individuals stationed in such a dangerous region leading up to the especially high-risk day of September 11, it raises questions about the ability of Clinton and her staff at the State Department to assess risk and adequately protect American lives, property and assets.

As Chairman Gowdy said on behalf of committee members at the start of last week's hearing, "We signed up because we wanted to honor the service and sacrifice of four people sent to a foreign land to represent us — who were killed — and do everything we can to prevent it from happening to others."

In the days ahead, as the committee continues to find answers and determine who should be held accountable, I am hopeful that we can ensure this sort of attack never happens again. I am also hopeful that never again will any Americans representing us abroad feel that they lack adequate security or that they are denied additional security reinforcements when they sense it is needed.

Tom Cole represents the Lawton area in the U.S. House of Representatives.