

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

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Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA

We're Sick of Waiting for Washington

Infrastructure-related jobs are good jobs: good pay, good benefits, family-supporting jobs. It's our primary sector, so while we represent construction workers in the building sector, in the pipeline and energy sectors, our number-one sector within our organization is infrastructure. And then what it does for the economy as well: the Highway Bill, from our view, has always been a jobs bill and one of the largest jobs bills in the history of our country. I think the problem is that Washington and this Congress is politically paralyzed, particularly in the House, and across the board. I'm not picking on any one party, any one group. I'm glad to see that there seems to be a little more of a grown-up conversation going on in the Senate, but no one wants to raise the gas tax, everyone's afraid and nibbling around the edges about how you pay for it. In general, I think that everyone understands the need, but politics being what they are—partisan politics, polarizing politics in DC—no one really wants to talk other than nibbling around the edges about how to pay for it. That's been frustrating for anybody and everybody engaged in the Highway Bill and engaged in the infrastructure sector.

We Have Ideas—Now We Need Action

The question is, is the political will there to do it? Because we have resources—and even this insanity, as far as I'm concerned, about whether to raise the gas tax. We support raising the gas tax because it hasn't been raised in 22 years. If you come up with a better idea, fine. I honestly think that it's going to have to be an all-of-the-above strategy, and we know what's happening to the Highway Trust Fund because cars are getting better gas mileage, so on and so forth. We supported it because we thought that's a good way of at least jump-starting this. We had the conversation about vehicle miles traveled, about repatriation, about all the other good ideas that are out there— but they're only ideas, and that's really been the frustrating part. Here is a country as strong and as good and as proud as the United States of America. I've seen a lack of will of really trying to get our hands around how we repair our crumbling transportation infrastructure in this country.

Washington Is Afraid to Talk About Infrastructure

Every dollar invested in infrastructure results in nearly two dollars of economic activity, according to the Federal Reserve Bank. For every three construction jobs created, five are created in other sectors, and these aren't my numbers. The Federal Highway Administration says that every billion dollars invested in highway construction creates 13,000 jobs. This is a boost to the economy. We can put green in workers pockets. We can rebuild our transportation, our infrastructure across the board, and be the great

country that we are. I get concerned when I see people not keeping this issue on the front burner. What would our transportation infrastructure—if we keep doing this, our infrastructure as a whole—what is it going to look like in 30 years? China is spending 10% of GDP on infrastructure when we're spending somewhere around 2.4%. We know what needs to be done. I think the American public, if you have a grown-up, adult conversation with them, they get that you want to have better infrastructure, we're going to have to figure out how to pay for it. They want to make sure that that money is going where it's intended to go, but I think the American public is willing, ready, and able to have that conversation. It's been too many in Washington DC that have been licking their fingers and seeing which way the winds are blowing, that have been afraid to have that conversation.

LIUNA Is Working Together for Change

We had a campaign a year ago where we had a smashed school bus and we were going around to districts, key districts around the country trying to, if you will, keep the pedal to the metal, to keep the issue front and center. We've done billboards. We've done robo calls with our members to keep them actively engaged, and asking them with this predictive dialing system to, you know, punch "1" and leave a message for their elected representative or representatives in DC. I think we need to keep doing more of it. If there's anything encouraging—because it's been a discouraging process—I am right now at least encouraged by Senator Inhofe and Senator Boxer in what I think and hope might happen in the Senate. I think that could lead to a bill that we could support and a bill that would be a good step in the right direction, far from perfect but a really good positive step. We can't repair our transportation infrastructure with having short-term extensions. This is no way to improve our crumbling infrastructure in this country. So I'm encouraged by that. I know we're going to keep beating the drums, and we're going to be out there doing everything we can to keep our members engaged, and our community partners as well. We continue to work with the US Chamber of Commerce and with other groups that are non-traditional allies to keep this issue on the front burner.

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