

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



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Statement by AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka On Senator Jim Bunning's Blocking of HR 4691 March 2, 2010

Senator Jim Bunning (R-KY) is turning out to be a one-man wrecking crew. In his determined campaign to end jobless benefits for 1.2 million unemployed workers, he has also managed to cause the furlough of 2,000 transportation workers and halt construction on 41 economic recovery projects in 17 states. Who says a single senator can't make a difference?

Last Friday Senator Bunning single-handedly blocked a vote on a House bill (H.R. 4691) that would have provided a short-term extension of the federal highway bill. Because authorization for the highway bill has expired, highway trust fund money cannot be collected or spent, and employees at the Transportation Department whose salaries are paid out of the trust fund have to be furloughed.

Yesterday Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced that 2,000 employees are being furloughed, primarily at the Federal Highway Administration (FHA), the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, some portions of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and some portions of the Research and Innovative Technology Administration (RITA).

The lapse of highway bill authorization means construction workers will be sent home from job sites because federal inspectors must be furloughed. Secretary LaHood also released a list of 41 federal lands construction projects in 17 states, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands that will be halted because federal inspectors are being pulled off the job. Halting these projects will make it harder for local economies, businesses, and working families to recover from the worst recession since the Great Depression.

There is simply no excuse for Senator Bunning holding these 2,000 furloughed workers hostage. Or for his holding construction workers at 41 projects across the country hostage. Or for his holding 1.2 million jobless workers hostage.

Senator Bunning embodies everything that is wrong with the U.S. Senate today: the ability of individual small-minded, selfish politicians to single-handedly prevent the majority from helping people who need help and solving our country's problems.

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