

October 24, 2008

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
S-221 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Robert Byrd
Chairman, Senate Committee on Appropriations
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Reid and Byrd:

As President Bush prepares to leave office, Americans are facing the toughest economic climate in memory. Unemployment is on the rise across the nation and reached a shameful 8.8% in my state of Rhode Island last month – the highest in the country. Even people fortunate enough to be employed must grapple with sky-rocketing health insurance costs and food and energy prices much higher than they were eight years ago. People are suffering, and we understand that Congress must act to stimulate the sagging economy. I believe that the best way to energize the economy is to create jobs, and urge you to bring up job-creating stimulus legislation when the Senate reconvenes next month.

Fiscal stimulus legislation will be most effective if it focuses on several areas. First, we should focus on critically underfunded transportation and water infrastructure projects. For example, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, over 72,000 of our nation's highway bridges are structurally deficient – meaning that they are weight-restricted or require immediate rehabilitation. The Federal Highway Administration has estimated that every \$1 billion of federal spending on infrastructure creates 35,000 new jobs, and according to a survey of state agencies, construction on up to \$18 billion of transportation projects is “ready to go.” We will have to do this water and transportation infrastructure work sooner or later; best to do it now when the economy so badly needs the jobs.

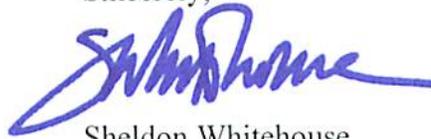
Second, many of our nation's schools are in poor condition, with structural and maintenance needs, and with significant opportunities for “greening” these structures. This “two-for” investment not only improves America's schools, but opens jobs to mid-size contractors ordinarily not engaged in major transportation and water infrastructure projects.

Another program that could play an important role in stimulating the economy is the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). I congratulate you on the increased funding for the WAP that was contained in the Continuing Resolution passed last month.

However, additional funding for the WAP would not only create new jobs, but also lower oil demand and prices, and lower heating costs for families facing a cold winter with energy prices still significantly higher than last year. Funding for the WAP in stimulus legislation can help smaller local contractors with employment, for a more “grass-roots” stimulus.

Thank you for your hard work on developing economic stimulus legislation. I hope you will agree that transportation and water infrastructure projects for the big contractors, school improvement projects for the medium-sized contractors, and weatherization for small local contractors, can provide a blanket of valuable employment across our communities at this difficult time. Please let me know if I can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sheldon Whitehouse". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator