



WisPolitics: President calls for \$50 billion investment in roads, rails, runways

9/7/2010

MILWAUKEE -- President Obama Monday proposed a \$50 billion plan to rebuild America's roads, rails and runways, calling it an investment that will move the country's economy forward and leave the next generation something lasting.

Obama's Labor Day speech to a union crowd mixed his proposal to invest in the country's infrastructure with an ode to the middle class and a series of swipes at Republicans. The president told the union crowd "you're the reason I'm here" as he promised to fight for the country's middle class.

His infrastructure proposal builds on the economic stimulus package the administration pushed through last year and includes a six-year plan to rebuild 150,000 miles of roads, construct and maintain 4,000 miles of rail, and rehabilitate and construct 150 miles of runways. It also calls for a next generation air-traffic control system to reduce travel time and delays.

The plan includes establishing an Infrastructure Bank that the administration said would focus on investments of national and regional significance.

With the polls showing the public uneasy over government spending and debt, the president will promise that his plan will be fully paid for and will not add to the deficit over time.

"I want America to have the best infrastructure in the world," Obama told the crowd.

Republicans immediately pounced on the news as another sign of wasteful spending by the administration and declared it was evidence that last year's stimulus package was a failure.

"These guys couldn't find \$50 billion in the trillions they've already spent?" said state GOP Chair Reince Priebus ahead of the president's speech. "The whole thing is absurd. We're upside down in this country, and this isn't going to do a thing to change that."

Obama spoke to a largely friendly crowd at the city's Laborfest celebration two years after appearing at the event during his run for the presidency. He got his loudest ovation, and the crowd began to chant "U.S.A, U.S.A, U.S.A." when Obama said he wants to make products in America and sell them to other countries, instead of the opposite. He also got a charge out of the crowd when he vowed to never allow the privatization of Social Security.

"It will not happen on my watch," he told the crowd.

Obama also used the rally at Milwaukee's Summerfest grounds to target Republicans, who he said are more concerned with scoring political points in the months leading up to the fall elections than they are in fixing the country's problems. He criticized Republicans as being concerned solely with cutting taxes for the wealthy while hoping economic success trickles down to the rest of America.

He also warned that Republicans want to return to their past policies, which he said devastated the middle class and pushed the economy into a ditch.

"I don't want to give them the keys back because they don't know how to drive," Obama said.

Obama's speech was his third visit to Wisconsin of the summer and his fifth to the state since he became president.

A series of national and local political figures attended the speech, including Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, the Dem frontrunner in the gov's race, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka, Labor Secretary Hilda Solis, U.S. Sen. Herb Kohl, D-Milwaukee, and U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore, D-Milwaukee.

Dem U.S. Sen. Russ Feingold, locked in a tight re-election race, attended Laborfest prior to the president's visit, but skipped the president's speech to keep prior plans to attend a Labor Day parade in his hometown of Janesville.

Barrett told the crowd the state needs people who will make jobs their No. 1 priority.

"Right now, I'm in a battle with two guys who love to say how bad Wisconsin is," he said. "But I've seen people who've never given up on their families, who've never given up on their communities or the state of Wisconsin. That's what this is all about."

The crowd roared when Moore mentioned Obama's support for firefighters, police, teachers and other union workers, but the reaction to her praise for the national health care bill was less enthusiastic.

Moore told voters to maintain the momentum that swept Obama into office.

"If you want to have his back, you have to be back," she said.

La Hood repeated this pledge that high-speed rail is coming to Wisconsin. The planned \$810 million line between Madison and Milwaukee has met some political resistance in Wisconsin with the top GOP gov hopefuls promising to nix the project if elected.

"High speed rail is coming to Wisconsin," LaHood said, to loud cheers and a few boos. "Nobody can stop this train."

Referring to \$810 million in federal funding earmarked for Wisconsin's high-speed rail project, LaHood said, "You don't want that money going somewhere else, you want that money right here where it will connect you to America."

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For WisPolitics*

See a White House fact sheet on the announcement: <http://www.wispolitics.com/index.aml?Article=209184>



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