



GOP governors to White House: Cooperate with states on infrastructure rollout

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A group of 16 Republican governors have penned a [letter](#) to the White House asking that it defer to states and limit bureaucratic drag as it distributes funds from the bipartisan infrastructure bill.

The \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is being rolled out throughout the nation, implementing a new era of major construction via a bill that enjoyed bipartisan support, especially in the Senate. The governors are asking the Biden administration to draft regulations and guidance that "defer to the states" and avoid "excessive consideration of equity, union memberships, or climate" as criteria for approving projects.

Led by Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, governors from the states of Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming co-signed the letter.

"We agree that the programs should get implemented 'without unnecessary bureaucracy and delay to rebuild America's infrastructure' and that red tape should not stand in the way," it reads. "Therefore, we ask that your Office of Management and Budget (OMB), along with the respective federal agencies charged with implementation, draft regulations and guidance that defer to the states and confer maximum regulatory flexibility."

Asked for a response, White House officials pointed to previous comments from Biden administration infrastructure czar Mitch Landrieu.

"As I said, I have personally spoke to over 40 governors — three their chiefs of staff," Landrieu [said](#) Tuesday. "I've talked to a number of Republican governors — all of whom, in the reddest of red states, were very welcoming. They were very appreciative that the president had asked to call."

The governors' letter raises concerns about red tape and federal bureaucracy slowing projects down, along with extra costs associated with union labor, equity, and climate concerns, saying the Biden administration "should not attempt to push a social agenda through hard infrastructure investments and instead should consider economically sound principles that align with state priorities."

Chris Edwards, director of tax policy studies at the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute, said the concerns stem from the wide leeway Congress gives federal agencies in administering laws.

"Biden has staffed many agencies with far-left leaders who may want to squelch conservative policy choices in the states," he said.

One major concern is the president's enthusiastic support for unions. The Davis-Bacon Act means that many projects, even in right-to-work states, will be completed using union labor that adds to the overall costs of projects. Edwards cited research that the rules raise costs on highway projects by an average of 22% while simultaneously slowing progress.

Regulations have also slowed project time frames, with a report for the Obama administration finding that the average time to complete federal environmental studies rose from 2.2 years in the 1970s to 6.6 years more recently. Transportation projects must now comply with 70 federal environmental laws and executive orders, up from 26 in 1970.

Any major government spending project brings with it concerns over red tape, extensive reviews and planning sessions, overhead costs, delays, and, in the worst cases, outright corruption.

The infrastructure bill allocates \$110 billion for roads and bridges, \$11 billion for transportation safety, \$1 billion to reconnect communities divided by 20th-century highway construction, \$39 billion for public transit, \$66 billion for rail, \$17 billion for ports, \$25 billion for airports, and \$55 billion for water, among other items.

It attracted the votes of 19 GOP senators and wouldn't have passed the House without the help of 13 Republicans. Its passage boosts infrastructure spending as a percentage of gross domestic product to its highest point since the 1980s.

Landrieu is now charged with leading the project rollout across all 50 states following a generally successful run as mayor of New Orleans.

The GOP governors expressed optimism about how the bill will help their states, charging that the dollars will go even further with an eye toward innovation rather than regulation.

"We stand ready to work with OMB to ensure the IIA has long-lasting improvements to our nation's infrastructure and is not plagued with burdensome, administrative red tape that will counter actual improvements and meaningful results," the letter concludes.