



## **Senator: U.S. should buy American steel for bridge projects**

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January 10, 2018

If Congress passes a bill to fix America's bridges, it needs to make sure taxpayer money is spent only on the U.S. made steel, U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown said Wednesday.

The Ohio Democrat discussed his Bridge Investment Act, which would speed the reconstruction of bridges, and touted the "Buy American" provision of the bill.

During a conference call with Ohio reporters, Brown contended taxpayer dollars spent to rebuilt U.S. bridges shouldn't be used on Chinese steel.

Instead, any measure should mandate only U.S. steel will be purchased to support jobs in Ohio and other U.S. states, Brown said.

Brown was accompanied on his call by Pat Gallagher, sub-district director for United Steelworkers District 1 in Ohio, who told the reporters many steel jobs in Ohio have been lost and U.S. steel is better made than foreign steel.

Brown didn't predict whether his bridge bill was likely to advance.

Asked if Congress would pass a big bill this year to rebuild U.S. infrastructure, Brown said it isn't clear yet, but he hopes President Donald Trump will follow up on his promise to get a measure passed.

"I'm still hopeful," Brown said.

A spokeswoman for U.S. Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, said Portman also supports "buy America" mandates.

"Senator Portman supports ensuring that all infrastructure projects are covered by the Buy America law, and that would include any new infrastructure plan Congress works on this year," said Emmalee Kalmbach, Portman's press secretary.

Brown said out of Ohio's 28,284 bridges, almost 2,000 are classified as structurally deficient, while 4,500 are considered functionally obsolete. Ohio has \$30 billion in bridge repair needs, according to the Department of Transportation, Brown said.

According to a list released by Brown's office, Erie County has 30 bridges considered "functionally obsolete," but only one labeled "structurally deficient." The structurally deficient bridge is a U.S. 6 bridge over Cranberry Creek, about one mile east of Ohio 2.

Daniel Ikenson, a trade expert at the Cato Institute, a free-market think tank, wrote in an email to the Register and said the mandate Brown seeks would waste taxpayer money and result in few bridges being built.

"As individuals spending their own money, most Americans seek to maximize the value of what they purchase. That often means shopping for groceries at a big supermarket chain instead of the gourmet market or patronizing Home Depot instead of the hardware store on Main Street. Shouldn't we expect Washington to spend our tax dollars with a similar eye toward prudence and value?" Ikenson said.

"When we artificially reduce the pool of qualified suppliers or the variety of eligible supplies that can satisfy procurement requirements, projects cost more, take longer to complete, and suffer from lower quality. Only a basic understanding of supply and demand is required to see that limiting competition for procurement projects ensures one outcome: taxpayers get a smaller bang for their buck," Ikenson said.

Ikenson continued: "Sure, some U.S. companies will win bids, hire new workers, and generate local economic activity. What will be less visible — but every bit as real — are the contracts denied numerous other U.S. businesses and workers because the resources have been stretched and depleted to satisfy restrictive procurement rules. Some U.S. companies and some U.S. workers may benefit, but the real value of public spending — the actual products and services procured — will decline."