



The Center Square

Critics pan infrastructure bill as Senate continues debate

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Critics of the bipartisan infrastructure bill have slammed the details of the proposal as the Senate debates the bill and its amendments.

The infrastructure bill would cost \$1.2 trillion in its current form and include \$550 billion of new spending. Much of the spending goes towards roads, bridges, mass transit, Amtrak rail, broadband, clean water and green energy initiatives.

Critics say the bill has wasteful projects that would misuse taxpayer funds.

“Just looking at the \$550 billion bill, what of that do we really need? It turns out very little,” said Randal O’Toole, senior fellow at the Cato Institute. “Where is the money gonna come from? It’s gonna come from inflation...so I guess you could say inflation and waste are my biggest concerns.”

As debate continues in the Senate, some Republicans are looking to slim down the bill through different amendments. Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, slammed the overspending while promoting his amendment to the bill on the Senate floor Tuesday.

“Most roads are not interstate, most systems are not the interstate highway system,” Lee said. “The federal government doesn’t need to do all of it. And in fact, what we find is that when states and localities do infrastructure, they can do so more efficiently, far less expensively.”

Another concern of critics is the proposed \$3.5 trillion reconciliation package Democrats want to get passed. Included in the package is what President Joe Biden and other Democrats consider to be “human infrastructure,” which among these includes amnesty for some illegal aliens.

Lora Ries, director for Center for Technology Policy and Senior Research and fellow at the Heritage Foundation, is critical of the amnesty proposal included in the reconciliation package Democrats want to pass alongside the bipartisan infrastructure bill.

“The two bills are inextricably linked,” Ries said. “The reconciliation bill includes amnesty from the USA citizenship act and Nancy Pelosi has said that she will not take up the infrastructure bill until the Senate passes the reconciliation measure.”

Ries wants the message to be clear that the controversial reconciliation proposal and the infrastructure bill are more closely tied than most believe.

“Amnesty is not infrastructure,” Ries said. “And when the leaders of the House and Senate try to link these the American public needs to know and what the implication of this is.”

Another criticism O’Toole has for the bill is the nearly \$550 billion in new spending attached to the bill and its potential effect on already increasing inflation.

“It’s the \$550 billion in new spending that’s on top of existing spending that’s the real problem,” he said. “None of that is going to come from user fees. I look at the items that are funded and they are all items that ought to be funded out of user fees: broadband, drinking water, airports, highways. They should all be funded out of user fees there is no need for deficit spending for them.

“Basically Congress is just giving favors to political constituents to get re-elected so that they can borrow from the future in order to benefit themselves today,” he added. “I don’t think that’s appropriate.

One of O’Toole’s chief concerns with the bill has to do with funding for Amtrak which he said would be a “money pit.”

“Amtrak when it started in [1971] it had about .16% of all passenger travel...and it’s been 50 years since then and it’s built itself all the way to .10% ...in other words it’s lost ground to other modes of travel,” O’Toole said. “It’s basically gnats eyelash on the elephant of transportation.”

O’Toole said the \$66 billion allocated for Amtrak has less to do with improving infrastructure and more to do with politics.

“[Amtrak] is totally irrelevant except politically,” O’Toole said. “Politically because it goes to something like 46 states it has political support in almost every congressional delegation and it gets a lot of money.”