

# Without federal highway bill, 700,000 jobs at risk

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Transportation and construction unions are lining up behind a bipartisan plan in the U.S. Senate that will pay for highway, bridge and mass transit funding programs, which are about to run out of money.

The AFL-CIO Transportation Trades Department, North America's Building Trades, and the Laborers Union all endorsed a plan introduced June 18 by Sens. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) and Chris Murphy (D-Conn.). The proposal would raise the federal gasoline tax by 6 cents in each of the next two years. After that it would be indexed to inflation. The senators estimate their plan would raise about \$164 billion over the next decade — enough to support the Highway Trust Fund at currently projected spending levels for 10 years.

The trust fund, which helps states

pay for transportation construction and upkeep, is due to run out of money by the end of summer. If Congress doesn't act soon, more than 700,000 middle class jobs will be at risk.

In spite of that, Sen. Murphy told Roll Call magazine that a formal bill has yet to be introduced.

"We acknowledge that ultimately this is going to be passed as part of a package coming out of the Finance Committee (which will draft the funding plan) and the Public Works Committee (which oversees transportation policy)," he said.

Oregon U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden chairs the Finance Committee.

Roll Call also reports that neither senator expects any action until after the November elections. Meanwhile, they believe Congress will pass a short-term patch to keep transportation programs funded through the end of

the year.

Building Trades Department President Sean McGarvey lauded Corker and Murphy for "saying 'enough is enough,' and for putting partisan politics aside and working across the aisle to construct a serious, bipartisan solution to deal with the shortfall. Their efforts will make our country safer, will grow our economy, and will create thousands of middle-class wage jobs across the United States."

The proposal, however, was criticized by the conservative Club for Growth. The Tea Party-influenced House Republicans are dead set against raising any taxes. They favor turning all road, bridge, bus and subway responsibility back to the states.

Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), a member of the Finance Committee, wants to cut highway project costs by slashing construction workers' pay — through repeal of the Davis-Bacon prevailing wage law.

And the U.S. House leadership has floated a proposal to fund highway projects by eliminating Saturday mail delivery.

Even the Corker/Murphy plan calls for making about \$190 billion in targeted tax breaks permanent.

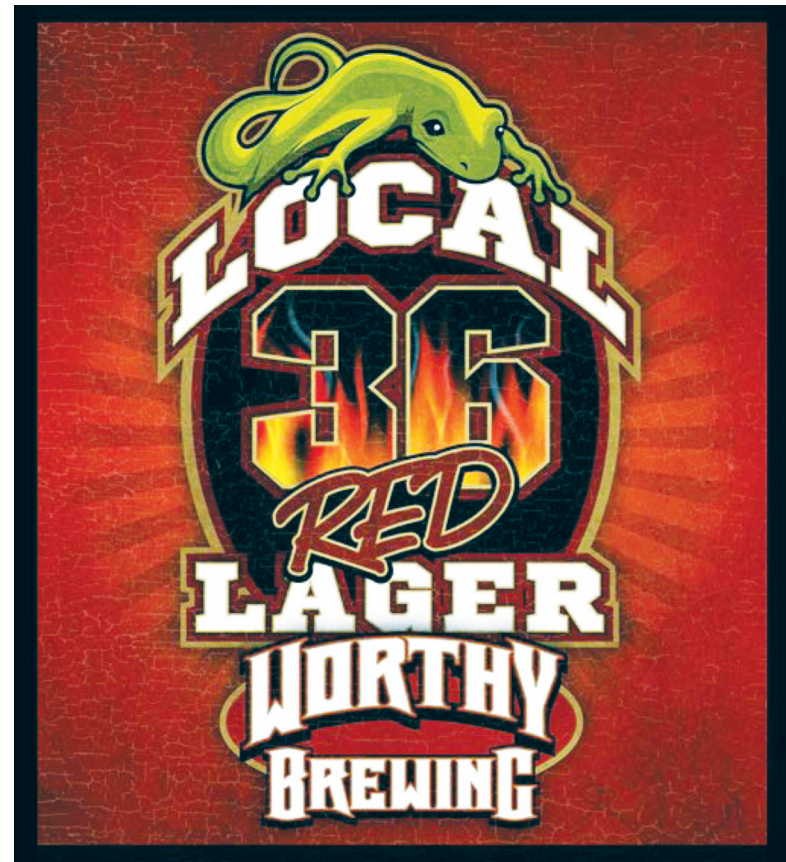
The federal gas tax of 18.4 cents per gallon has not been raised since 1993. The Highway Trust Fund has also been hurt by the recession and slow economic growth, which caused user-fee revenues to drop. Reduced driving and increasingly fuel efficient vehicles are also taking bites out of federal revenues. As a result, user-fee revenue has lagged behind spending, and the deficit is expected to continue into the future.

To avoid cutting transportation funding, since 2008 Congress has made up the gap between user-fee revenue and spending by transferring \$55 billion into the Highway Trust Fund.

Some states, not sure if a funding measure can make it through such a di-

vided Congress, have canceled and/or postponed projects. The Oregon Department of Transportation announced

last month that it was postponing new road construction projects for at least a year.



## RAISE A CUP TO SOLIDARITY:

### New beer will take its name from a local union

A craft brewery in Bend, Oregon, is naming a beer after a Portland labor union: Local 36 of the International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Allied Workers. The beer, by Worthy Brewing, will be called Local 36 Red Lager, and there's a story behind it.

Brewery owner Roger Worthington is a California lawyer specializing in representing workers exposed to asbestos. Asbestos, a naturally occurring mineral, is made up of tiny fibers that are as strong as steel but can be woven like cotton and are highly resistant to heat. Before 1975, it was used heavily in shipyards, construction, and many other industries. But breathed into the lungs, the fibers can lodge in tissues, resulting in changes to the cells that may eventually lead to mesothelioma, asbestosis and other cancers. Long after they knew the harm asbestos was causing, companies continued to expose workers, and that became the grounds for decades of lawsuits by workers who developed asbestos-related diseases.

In 1989, when Worthington was just starting out as a lawyer, he opened a Portland law office in space rented from Carpenters Local 247. Local 36 (better known as Asbestos Workers Local 36) gave Worthington a shot, and referred some of his first clients. Today his firm Worthington & Caron, P.C., has offices in Dallas, Texas, and in San Pedro and Dana Point, California.

The harm of asbestos is personal for

Worthington: His father, David "Punch" Worthington, worked in Portland-area shipyards, paper mills, and power plants in the 1960s as a member of the Painters Union, and was exposed to asbestos while sandblasting fireproofing off of steel. He died in 2006 of asbestos-related lung cancer.

Worthington closed his Portland office after his father died, but returned to Oregon in 2011 to found the brewery and a related enterprise growing hops. He says Local 36 Red Lager is a way to thank the union that gave him a start.

"I'm always grateful," Worthington said. "They gave me a shot. One thing led to another, and I did pretty well."

Worthington plans to launch the beer July 16 at a special event for active and retired Local 36 members. After that, the beer will be available in 22 oz. bottles and in kegs, distributed to local bars and retailers by Columbia Distributing. The bottle's label will sport a salamander borrowed from the union's logo. According to legend, the salamander is associated with fire, and is variously said to be born out of, or unharmed by, flames. Worthy Brewing is making one batch of Local 36 Red Lager, but Worthington said it could make more if the beer proves popular.

DETAILS: All local 36 members and retirees are invited for beer and dinner at the Sextant Bar and Galley, 4035 NE Marine Drive, Wednesday, July 16, from 5:30 to 8 p.m.

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