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### “A Preliminary Look at the Infrastructure Bill”

While the game is far from over, it is appropriate to consider the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress’s draft [Infrastructure Bill](#) (H.R. 3684) at this time for a variety of reasons—none more important than its potential positive impact on the Black American economy. But the proof is in the pudding. In the final analysis—after the bill has undergone the US Congress’s fine tuning, signed into law, and has been fully implemented (most funding to be provided by the bill will expire in fiscal year 2026)—we can assess the extent to which this legislation has helped raise and sustain Black employment and has increased substantially the receipts/revenue of Black businesses (employers and nonemployers).

The bill is a veritable candy store of opportunity to those prepared to take advantage of the nation’s \$1.0 trillion effort to improve its infrastructure on numerous fronts. But therein lies the rub. Our review of the bill and our knowledge of the distribution of Black labor and business across industries that will be affected most by the bill causes us to believe that Black economic agents are not well positioned to take advantage of these opportunities.

No question about it, there is a clear emphasis in the bill on extending access to projects/programs and funds to “minority” and “disadvantaged” groups—although

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES—117th Cong., 1st Sess.

#### H. R. 3684

To authorize funds for Federal-aid highways, highway safety programs, and transit programs, and for other purposes.

reading between the lines might cause one to conclude that these terms point to women more so than to Black Americans. In addition, certain projects/programs (e.g., Section 11509-Reconnecting communities; Section 50104-Assistance for small and disadvantaged communities (drinking water); and Section 60304/5-Digital equity program (broadband)) appear to be purposefully tailored to help improve Black American well-being. At the same time, we must acknowledge that the bulk of the funds to be made available through the bill are not linked to these projects/programs.

The bulk of the funds to be provided by the bill concern, *inter alia*, heavy construction and engineering (roads, bridges, and dams); heavy manufacturing (electric transportation equipment including railroad equipment, electric and hydro power grids, water treatment and supply equipment, and heating and cooling systems that are energy efficient); technology (automated and electric transportation, broadband, and energy efficiency); and advanced data research (traffic systems, safety, and flows).

We believe that the record will show that Black employment and business are limited in many of these areas.<sup>1</sup>

Even when Black Americans are tapped to benefit on the frontside of certain projects/programs, it is likely that non-Black Americans will benefit on the backside of these projects/programs. For example, the Reconnecting communities component of the bill already mentioned calls initially for the development of feasibility studies to reconsolidate Black areas of influence that were fragmented/disrupted by highways that bifurcated them decades ago. Black Americans may be able to benefit from the feasibility development process.<sup>2</sup> However, after feasibility studies are approved, it is highly likely that White heavy construction and engineering firms will benefit most from construction projects that will reroute the highways and help reconsolidate Black areas of influence.

An important provision of the bill is that it claws back sizeable amounts of funds that made social assistance transfers available to Americans who are hurting economically from the Covid-19 pandemic. As we all know, there are ongoing Covid surges due to

variants. Consequently, these claw backs could be premature and could cause undue harm to those who can least afford it.

Therefore, Black Americans should be wise when assessing the impacts of this bill and others like it that are designed to stimulate the economy and pave the way for Democrats to maintain control of the White House and the Congress until 2028. It appears that other Americans will be getting the real meat, while Black Americans will be getting mainly fragments.

As already mentioned, let us check the employment statistics and the receipts/revenue of Black firms before the 2024 election to determine whether our 2020 votes based on a long list of promises have actually produced the results that we desire.

Of course, if the outcomes do not seem so favorable by 2024, the Democrats are likely to request more time because this legislation bleeds over into the next presidential term.

But the data should speak for themselves and should help us decide concerning the efficacy of the Infrastructure Bill and others like it.

B Robinson  
08/06/21

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<sup>1</sup> In connection with the new and growing emphasis on electric vehicles, which are generally more costly than carbon fuel operated vehicles, Black economists should consider the possibility that low-earning Black Americans may be priced out of the new automobile market in the coming years. This may

exacerbate access to employment issues for low-income Black Americans.

<sup>2</sup> The benefits are not guaranteed or may be minimized because there may be few-to-no qualified Black firms to prepare the feasibility studies in certain areas of the country.