**Headline:** Why the GOP Is Trying to Take Credit for Union Workers’ Infrastructure Victory

By Tom Conway

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**[Article Body:]**

John Campbell and other union activists led the fight in 2021 for historic infrastructure legislation needed to modernize the nation, support millions of good-paying jobs, and supercharge the economy.

They wrote tens of thousands of postcards, made countless phone calls, and pounded the halls of the U.S. Capitol, ultimately securing enough votes to overcome Republican opposition and push the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)](https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/05/politics/house-votes-infrastructure-build-back-better/index.html) through the Democratic-led Congress. Democratic President Joe Biden swiftly signed the legislation into law.

Now, as that union victory unleashes $1.2 trillion for new roads and other [hugely popular projects](https://www.nrdc.org/bio/erik-d-olson/infrastructure-laws-lead-pipe-removal-effort-wildly-popular) from coast to coast, [Republicans who tried to kill the legislation want to jump on the bandwagon and take credit](https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/09/politics/biden-republicans-infrastructure-law/index.html) for the same investments they once opposed.

“Republicans are so short-sighted that they can’t see past their donors,” fumed Campbell, a member of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR), pointing out how ridiculous opponents of the infrastructure package look as [money floods into their districts](https://www.democrats.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/majority-leader-schumer-floor-remarks-on-americans-across-the-country-seeing-the-impact-of-investments-made-possible-by-the-infrastructure-investment-and-jobs-act) for high-speed broadband, lead-free drinking water, and other life-changing initiatives.

“They have no shame,” Campbell said of the Republicans trying to evade responsibility for how they voted. “They have no integrity. They have no principles.”

For example, Representative Robert B. Aderholt of Alabama in June issued a press release in which he praised a [$1.6 million grant for a railroad bridge](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/07/09/gop-spending-infrastructure-ira-biden/) in his district and proclaimed himself “always happy to support this type of funding in Congress.”

Yet he voted against the IIJA, which expanded the very program providing the grant for the railroad bridge.

Representative Ashley Hinson, who represents part of Campbell’s home state of Iowa, was another of the [200 House Republicans](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/11/05/us/politics/house-vote-infrastructure.html) who ignored workers’ demands and voted against the IIJA.

But nothing as inconvenient as the truth was going to stop Hinson from trying to [grab the limelight](https://iowastartingline.com/2022/01/19/hinson-takes-credit-for-infrastructure-funds-she-labeled-as-socialist-voted-against/) and take credit in a tweet when the Army Corps of Engineers announced $829 million in IIJA funding for a major project benefiting her constituents.

The Corps will use the funds to [construct a new 1,200-foot lock and repair other parts](https://www.iowaagribusinessradionetwork.com/hinson-lauds-army-corps-829m-lock-and-dam-investment/) of an Upper Mississippi River transportation system critical not only for Midwestern farmers, miners, and factory workers but for the entire nation’s economy.

It’s game-changing for sure, no thanks to Hinson. In all, the IIJA delivers billions for Iowa, including $19 million so far to [prevent the kind of flooding](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Iowa-Fact-Sheet-E3.pdf) that ravaged much of the state, [including Cedar Rapids](https://www.cedar-rapids.org/discover_cedar_rapids/flood_of_2008/2008_flood_facts.php), part of Hinson’s district, in 2008.

It’s also providing the city of Waterloo—in Hinson’s district—with [$20.5 million for a “complete streets project”](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Iowa-Fact-Sheet-May.pdf) on La Porte Road that will improve safety for motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

And it’s delivering [$20.4 million to Eastern Iowa Airport](https://www.thegazette.com/government-politics/on-iowa-tour-promoting-federal-investments-pete-buttigieg-lambastes-anti-lgtbq-laws-in-state/)—also part of Hinson’s district—for a modernization effort that will bring more gates, improved facilities for passengers with special needs, and other upgrades. After attempting to torpedo the IIJA, Hinson had the gall to join other officials at a press conference to tout the airport overhaul and say she’s “proud” of the work being done there.

The benefits of these and other IIJA projects will last for generations and enhance national security, noted Campbell, a retired tire worker and member of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 310L who’s spent decades supporting pro-worker candidates and initiatives.

“This bill is critical for the success of America. Period,” said Campbell, who’s angry with Hinson not only for boasting about investments she opposed but for sitting on the sidelines while working Iowans charted a path forward.

“What was her alternative?” he said, referring to the infrastructure legislation. “What did she propose to make Iowans’ lives better?”

Other Republicans who opposed the infrastructure program all but admitted their folly by sending letters to the Biden administration seeking IIJA funds for projects their constituents want and need.

Representative Paul Gosar of Arizona [sent three letters requesting millions for a trio of road projects, while Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky sent 10 letters](https://www.cnn.com/2022/10/07/politics/infrastructure-spending-republican-critics/index.html) seeking support for road, riverwalk, and dam improvements, among other work.

Senator Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee voted against the bill as well but later wrote letters seeking funding for nine projects and [tweeted her support](https://democrats.org/news/shot-chaser-maga-republicans-infrastructure-hypocrisy-knows-no-bounds/) for the progress that the city of Wartburg made in expanding broadband access. The IIJA provides millions for Tennessee to deliver high-speed internet to every household.

The IIJA—also [opposed by Senator Bill Hagerty and all of the Republican members of Tennessee’s House delegation](https://tennesseelookout.com/2021/11/10/editors-column-tennessees-gop-representatives-blew-infrastructure-vote/)—allocated millions more for the state’s roads and bridges as well as [$150 million](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Tennessee-Fact-Sheet-June.pdf) to support a new plant in Chattanooga that will supply graphite for the electric vehicle market and other industries.

Those investments will help to foster growth that residents of Tennessee already see all around them.

“Jobs are here,” said Van Tenpenny, financial secretary for USW Local 1155L, noting the infrastructure program creates new demand for truck tires produced by union members at the Bridgestone plant in Warren County while also making the highway improvements needed to more efficiently get products to customers.

As Republicans try to take credit for the infrastructure program, Tenpenny said, it’s important for union members to continue pointing out the truth. Workers and their Democratic allies created the wave of progress now washing across the nation.

“We’re responsible for it,” he said.