



SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION RAY LAHOOD

Bipartisanship Personified, Cabinet Secretary and Congressman Puts Spotlight on Compromise

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood gave an eye-opening Washington Week breakfast address to the delegates, offering sobering examples of how America's fiscal challenges are affecting its aging infrastructure. Describing the nation as "one big pothole," Secretary LaHood predicted that the upcoming reauthorization of the nation's major transportation legislation could remedy the situation if long-term investment and compromise are the order of the day. "Do we raise the Highway Trust Fund? Do we raise the gas tax? Do we find other ways of funding transportation?" asked the former seven-term Congressman, laying out the choices lawmakers face in the context of current debt and deficit challenges. A Republican now serving in a Democratic cabinet, Secretary LaHood was hopeful that Congress will be compelled to forge consensus over the urgent need for infrastructure improvement. Known as a moderate, he gave a quick lesson on the forthcoming action highlighting the crucial role of the committees: "The process of compromise is enshrined in the committee structure—there, through the hearing process, is really where the debate takes place. This is where listening takes place. This is where compromise takes place, and 'compromise' is not a bad word. Do you have to compromise your principles? Of course not." Secretary LaHood shared the arc of his long career in public service, that began as a teacher

in middle school before entering government. He emphasized the continuous learning curve that has been critical to his success, first in local government and then as a congressional staffer before running to serve Illinois' 18th district; ultimately serving as Chairman of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure from 1995–2000. Delivering a passionate plea to abstain from texting and driving, he said: "The reason that I call texting and driving 'an epidemic' is because we all have mobile devices and we all think we can use them anytime, anywhere. The one place you cannot use these is when you're behind the wheel of a car. If you're looking down, you can go the length of a football field in four seconds without looking through the front windshield. You were all taught both hands on the wheel, both eyes on the road, and you must not forget it." Closing on an optimistic note, he reminded the delegates that as a Republican serving a Democratic president, he personifies the fact that bipartisanship exists. "What you're experiencing now is a very important time in the history of our country, and I have no doubt that many of you will be forming that history. I hope that you'll remember this experience as a part of what enabled you to think about how we solve big problems."

Secretary LaHood with Illinois delegates Thomas Clark and Anais Carell