attorney and later promoted to chief deputy district attorney,

Former District Attorney and current Governor of Colorado Bill Ritter wrote, ''throughout Mr. Brimmer's service at the Denver District Attorney's Office, he upheld the highest standards of integrity, fairness, honesty, hard work—and a dedication to public service.'' Governor Ritter felt he could trust Phil Brimmer with the most challenging cases that came through the office; Phil Brimmer did not disappoint.

Current Denver District Attorney Mitch Morrissey recently wrote of his former colleague in a similar fashion. ''[Phil Brimmer] never failed to impress me both with his work ethic and his knowledge of the law . . . He was one of our most valued attorneys.'' The sentiments of Governor Ritter and District Attorney Morrissey are reflected in numerous other letters sent to my office from people who worked with Mr. Brimmer throughout the years.

Similar to his experience as deputy district attorney, Mr. Brimmer has been exceptionally successful as Federal prosecutor. Almost 7 years ago, he joined the U.S. Attorney's Office as an assistant U.S. attorney and has worked on an assortment of criminal cases as chief of the major crimes section and now as chief of special prosecutions section.

As chief of special prosecutions in the U.S. Attorney's Office, Mr. Brimmer handled very challenging and procedurally complex case, dealing with an assortment of crimes, including child exploitation, cyber crimes, capital crimes, and prison crimes. Attorney general of Colorado John Suthers hired Phil Brimmer in the fall of 2001, recognizing his ''excellent work ethic'' and his ''tremendous intellectual capability''. It seems Mr. Brimmer continues to impress everyone he works beside as he continues to serve Colorado's legal community with great distinction.

Anyone familiar with Philip Brimmer's professional credentials can attest to his intelligence and his talent. Anyone familiar with Philip Brimmer, as an individual, would certainly observe that he is respectful, loyal, and good-humored. His integrity, honesty and professional dedication to public service also contribute to making Philip Brimmer a ''rare find.''

From my conversations with Mr. Brimmer, it is clear that he recognizes the proper role of the judiciary. His personal qualities and character, coupled with his professional experience, an ABA rating of ''well qualified'', and outstanding bipartisan recommendations from within Colorado's legal community make Philip Brimmer ideally suited to service on the federal district court.

CHRISTINE ARGUELLO

I would also like to welcome Ms. Christine Arguello to the U.S. Senate.

This is not my first endorsement of Ms. Arguello. In 1999, I made a recommendation to then President Clinton to nominate Ms. Arguello for a seat on the U.S. District Court for the District of Colorado. This past January, I again offered her name to President Bush and urged he consider nominating Christine Arguello to fill a vacant judgeship on Colorado's Federal district court.

I speak before the Senate today in support of the nomination of this fine lawyer for service on the Federal bench. In her more than 25 years of legal experience, she has worn many different hats. She has experience as a trial lawyer, in-house counsel, law professor, and public servant.

She is a skilled attorney with impressive credentials and a diverse professional background.

Ms. Arguello earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Colorado and her law degree from Harvard. She began her distinguished professional career working as an associate for a law firm. She moved to a public service career after 19 years of private practice when she joined the Colorado Attorney General's Office, where she served as the chief deputy attorney general under the former attorney general, and now my currently Senate colleague, KEN SALAZAR.

In 2003, she returned to private practice as a civilian litigation attorney, and in 2006 she assumed her current job as managing senior associate counsel for the University of Colorado at Boulder.

She has been described by many as a trailblazer. Ms. Arguello and the wide-ranging experiences and accomplishments she brings with her would make her a great asset to the Federal bench. In addition to being the first Hispanic from Colorado to be admitted to Harvard Law School and the first Hispanic to be promoted to partner at one of the ''big four'' law firms in Colorado, Ms. Arguello has added law professor to a long list of accomplishments.

She became a tenured professor at the University of Kansas Law School and joined the faculty at the University of Colorado School of Law and the University of Denver College of Law as an adjunct professor and visiting professor, respectively.

It is with a great deal of pleasure that I am able to see to conclusion the confirmation of Phil Brimmer and Christine Arguello to the District Court of Colorado.

Again, I cannot say how thankful I am I have a good friend and colleague such as Senator KEN SALAZAR who is willing to work with me on issues that are facing the Colorado District Court and many other issues that are facing the State of Colorado.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland is recognized.

THE ECONOMY

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I seek recognition under morning business and wish to speak about the economic crisis facing the Nation. I will be brief because I think we need less deeds and more action.

Mr. President, we do have an economic crisis. We do have a credit crisis. We need to be able to protect our economy, we need to act to protect the taxpayer, and we need to act to protect the distressed homeowner.

I am frustrated and deeply troubled. I am deeply troubled by where we find ourselves when I observe that House Republicans are defying their own President. Our economy is in trouble.

Yesterday, leadership on both sides of the aisle and both sides of the dome went to the White House at the President's request to try to deal with this issue. To my surprise, House Republicans poked their own President in the eye and derailed a plan that we were developing. Now we need action. And I say to President Bush, we need Presidential leadership. We need a situation room. We need a situation room not at CNN, we need an economic situation room at the White House.

I ask the President, while all of this hubbub is going on on Capitol Hill, to be the commander in chief of the economy. We need a commander in chief of the economy. I ask him to do what he has done as Commander in Chief, to listen to his generals. He has Paulson, he has Bernanke, and he also needs to get his Republican troops in line.

Yesterday we had a method and we had momentum for working on this problem. I salute my Senate colleagues, Senator DODD, the chairman of the Banking Committee, and his Democrats. But I also salute the Republicans in the Senate, on a bipartisan basis. They were working methodically, they were working steadily, and they were acting responsibly. We had a plan.

What happened is the Republican House became afraid of voters. I know we need to listen to voters. I am getting the same kind of e-mails they are. In the last 72 hours, I have received close to 8,000 e-mails and only 30 were for this plan.

I have received over 1,300 phone calls and almost all were against the bailout and why they are against the bailout. They wonder who is on their side, who is looking out for them; who is going to bail them out of their stagnant wages; who is going to bail them out of their rising, escalating health care; who is going to bail them out when they are trying to pay their utility and put gas in their car and buy groceries. Seniors are wondering who is going to bail them out as they try to make sure they do not outlive their income. We listened to them loudly and clearly. Yet what we need to be able to do is not only respond to them, we need to be able to respond to this credit crisis.

Make no mistake, if we do not act we could lose jobs that could affect small business and ordinary homeowners. It could cause massive or significant temporary layoffs.

Now, I am for reform. I absolutely do want reform. I believe we were working

to get it. We have to get back on track, and the President needs to get us back on track.

I believe what the Senate was doing protected the economy by putting capital where it needed to go. It also protected the taxpayer by making sure that we had a stake in the outcome. We absolutely also forbade golden parachutes and put a cap on compensation. Again, we made sure that those who created the crisis do not further gouge us by profiting off the crisis. We had methods and we had momentum for both solving the crisis and at the same time bringing reform. But in the midst of it, the House Republicans decided they were going to do their own plan and come up with some kind of insurance plan. Well, where were they 2 days before that?

Then, the Republican Presidential nominee parachuted in, ran back and forth on both sides of the Capitol and huffed and puffed. Huffing and puffing will not do it. We have had too much huff, we have had too much puff, and there is now a need for Presidential leadership.

I am glad the Republican nominee decided to go to Mississippi and debate. That is where we will debate the economic future of the United States of America. Tonight's topic should be on the economy. We should listen to the Republican nominee and the Democratic nominee. We need to hear their ideas on the future of the economy of the United States, how they will be the next commander in chief of the economy; how that will create jobs that stay in the United States of America and pay a living wage, not a survivable wage; how they will deal with the skyrocketing cost of health care.

How are we going to deal with energy? It affects utilities and gas and, therefore, groceries. We need that debate because it is on the economic future, and I am glad he is going.

And here, while they are in Mississippi debating, we should begin to act. I ask that the President create this economic situation room. I am proud of my Senate colleagues. I salute the Republicans on the other side for working. We all worked together. We have all had to set aside, in these last couple of days, the outcome we wanted.

I am at heart and soul a reformer. I wanted more reform. I want more teeth in the Securities and Exchange Commission where they do not just bark, that they bite. I was one of the people 10 years ago who voted against deregulation of the financial institutions. But we could not get that much reform in this package. We can do that on another day.

I stood on the floor of the Senate and said I wanted retribution for those who created fraud and engaged in predatory practices against unsuspecting homeowners. I want them investigated. I want people to go to jail. That is why, as chair of the committee that funds the FBI, we put money into the Federal checkbook so we can now have the FBI agents out there doing forensics, looking at the books of those people who tried to cook the books.

So, sure, I am for reform, and I am for retribution. But right now we have to focus on rescue. So let's get it together. Let's put politics aside. I believe the Senate is acting that way. The House Republicans need to act that way. But the one person who has called us to come together, the President of the United States, has now got to go hands on, to listen to his generals, get his troops in line, and let's win this battle for America.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I want to say to Senator MIKULSKI how much I appreciate her words of passion, of leadership. I think she laid it out for the American people. We are on their side. We want to make sure we address their concerns.

The fact is, it looked as though we had a framework, I say to my friend, that was workable. The fact is, we had brought together people from both sides. Sadly, that was all disrupted when Presidential politics got involved.

Now, I want to say something from the heart. I know all of my colleagues agree with what I say. On an issue such as this one, which is kind of a once-in-a-lifetime—we certainly hope for us—issue, where we are in a crisis situation, where we are being told by the President's men who have not handled this economy with any, in my opinion, skill at this moment in time, it is one of those votes that is going to be a vote of conscience for each of us. It is going to be a vote we think about. A lot of us are already losing sleep about this subject. This is tough stuff. And no Presidential candidate is going to tell me how to vote—with all due respect to JOHN MCCAIN—whether he flies in or flies out or whatever he does. This Senator, and, frankly, I think Senators—Republicans, Democrats, Independents—each Senator will vote their constituents' interests, what they think is best for their families, for the small businesses, to keep the economy going, what is right for taxpayers, what is right to get to the root cause of the problem.

I want to say that as far as I am concerned, frankly, Senator MCCAIN has one vote, and so do I. My vote will be my vote and no one else is going to tell me how to vote for my people. I felt that passion in my friend's remarks. It is very sad that we have lost the momentum that she talked about. But I believe we will get it back.

I know our chairman of the Banking Committee, CHRIS DODD, has an open door. I know he is waiting for the Republicans to walk back in and say: Let's get to work across party lines. We hope they will do that.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 3999

Mr. President, on behalf of Senator KLOBUCHAR and myself, I ask unanimous consent to move a bill that would be very important for this economy that we know is suffering, very important for jobs, and very important to save lives. It is a bill that would immediately make $1 billion available to rebuild our Nation's bridges.

It passed out of the Environment and Public Works Committee, and it passed the full House of Representatives. Why? Because we do not want to see another bridge go down in Minnesota or any other place. Yes, we believe it is important to move in this direction to save lives, to rebuild our infrastructure, and to create jobs.

I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 1050, H.R. 3999; that the bill be read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I am very disturbed and disheartened that our Republican friends would object to such a bill at such a time. During rush hour on August 1, 2007, the I–35 West bridge in Minneapolis collapsed, sending dozens of cars into the Mississippi River. This tragedy, which every American remembers well, claimed the lives of 13 people.

Just to see that bridge go down broke your heart. It served, though, as a wake-up call—at least we thought it did—that we cannot neglect our Nation's crumbling infrastructure. Half of all the bridges in this country were built before 1964, the average age of a bridge in the national bridge inventory is 43 years old, and 26 percent of our bridges are deficient. Yet the Republicans will not allow this bipartisan bill to go through. It shouldn't take a tragedy such as the one in Minneapolis to remind us that the safety of our bridges and highways and other infrastructure can be a matter of life and death.

Senator KLOBUCHAR and Chairman OBERSTAR have worked to address these problems. That bill I asked unanimous consent to pass today, the National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act of 2008, will begin those repairs.

I beg my Republican friends to wake up and smell the roses. A bridge collapsed. We need to rebuild our bridges and put people to work to do it. If we have enough money to rebuild Iraq, we ought to have enough money to rebuild bridges in this country that are a danger to our people.

The I–35 tragedy claimed the lives of 13 people. It has also served as an urgent wake-up call that we cannot neglect our Nation's crumbling infrastructure.

The National Transportation Safety Board has not yet issued the results of

its investigation into the Minnesota bridge collapse, but we do know that additional resources are needed to repair and replace aging bridges and highways across our Nation.

Half of all bridges in this country were built before 1964, and the average age of a bridge in the National Bridge Inventory is 43 years old.

Of approximately 600,000 bridges nationwide, about 26 percent are considered deficient.

This means we need to make significant investments just to maintain our bridges at safe functioning levels, followed by even larger investments over the next 20 to 30 years to completely replace aging bridges.

It should not take a tragedy like the one in Minneapolis to remind us that the safety of our bridges, highways, and other infrastructure can be a matter of life and death.

Senator KLOBUCHAR and Chairman OBERSTAR have worked together to address problems with our Nation's bridges by introducing legislation entitled, the National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act of 2008.

The House version of this legislation, H.R. 3999, was approved by an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 357 to 55 in the House of Representatives on July 24 and was approved the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works by voice vote on September 17.

This legislation makes changes to the requirements set forth in the Highway Bridge Program, while authorizing a one-time additional $1 billion for bridge repair and replacement.

One key provision in this legislation is a requirement for the Department of Transportation to develop a national risk-based priority system for the repair, rehabilitation or replacement of each structurally deficient or functionally obsolete bridge.

We have great challenges before us. But at the end of the day it is a matter of setting priorities.

If we are going to keep our people safe and our economy strong and healthy, we need to make a serious investment in our transportation infrastructure.

I ask unanimous consent to have the following letters of support printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CIVIL ENGINEERS,
Washington, DC, July 16, 2008.

Hon. JAMES OBERSTAR,
Chairman, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Washington, DC.

Hon. JOHN MICA,
Ranking Member, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN OBERSTAR AND RANKING MEMBER MICA: On behalf of the more than 140,000 members of the American Society of Civil Engineers we offer our strong support for the National Highway System Bridge Reconstruction Initiative (H.R. 3999).

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), approximately 74,000 U.S. bridges are classified as structurally deficient. Furthermore, the U.S. DOT estimates it would cost $65 billion to fix all existing bridge deficiencies.

This proposal is an important step toward addressing the problem of our nation's crumbling infrastructure. It makes constructive improvements to the current system by outlining bridge inspector qualifications and improving federal oversight of state inspections. Any bridge safety program should be based on providing for public safety first.

Successfully and efficiently addressing the nation's failing infrastructure, bridges and highways and other public works systems, will require a long-term, comprehensive nationwide strategy—including identifying potential financing methods and investment requirements. For the safety and security of our families, we, as a nation, can no longer afford to ignore this growing problem. We must demand leadership from our elected officials, because without action, aging infrastructure represents a growing threat to public health, safety, and welfare, as well as to the economic well-being of our nation.

Once again, ASCE is grateful for your leadership on this most important problem. If we can be of any assistance in this matter, please do not hesitate to contact Brian Pallasch, ASCE Managing Director of Government Relations & Infrastructure Initiatives, at (202) 789–7842 or at bpallasch@asce.org.

Sincerely yours,

DAVID G. MONGAN,
President.

AMERICAN ROAD & TRANSPORTATION BUILDERS ASSOCIATION,
Washington, DC, July 15, 2008.

Hon. JAMES OBERSTAR,
Chairman, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN OBERSTAR: The American Road and Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA) strongly supports the National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act, H.R. 3999. Your proposal would generate federal leadership in response to a national need, setting priorities and establishing the accountability Americans demand and deserve.

The collapse of the 1–35 W Bridge August 1, 2007, is a stark reminder the U.S. transportation system is not keeping pace with the demands being placed on it and that tragic consequences can occur when warning signs are not acted upon. According to the Federal Highway Administration, more than one-quarter of all bridges on the NHS are considered either functionally obsolete or structurally deficient. The U.S. Department of Transportation also estimates at least $65 billion could be invested immediately in a cost-beneficial fashion to address existing bridge deficiencies.

The nation has vast unmet bridge needs that are well documented and irrefutable. The U.S., however, is not just suffering from a bridge crisis; it is suffering from a transportation infrastructure crisis. We need to dramatically upgrade the nation's bridges, roadways and public transportation facilities and increased investment is a critical part of the solution. The U.S. transportation network is a holistic system and we must begin the process of addressing all of these needs in a meaningful way as soon as possible. H.R. 3999 is a logical first step toward a restructuring of the core federal highway and public transportation programs to address unmet national needs in the 2009 reauthorization of the federal highway and transit programs.

ARTBA commends your leadership on this critical national issue and pledges to work with you to ensure all U.S. transportation infrastructure needs are met.

Sincerely,

T. PETER RUANE,
President and CEO.

FEDERATION OF STATE PIRGS,
Washington, DC, July 16, 2008.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE: One year after the tragic collapse of the 1–35 W Bridge in Minneapolis, our country's bridges remain in critical condition and in need of significant funding for maintenance and repair. We strongly urge you to support H.R. 3999, The National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act.

The unmet needs of our nation's aging transportation infrastructure endanger the safety and security of American families. While billions in federal funds are spent annually on new highway projects and lane expansion, our existing assets have been left behind. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, approximately 74,000 bridges in this country are classified as structurally deficient.

H.R. 3999 is an important first step towards addressing this national problem. The legislation authorizes dedicated funding for bridge repairs throughout the country and provides minimum inspection standards.

The tragedy in Minnesota should serve as a wake-up call for this Congress, which must embrace an approach to highway spending that prioritizes maintenance and repair of our existing roadways over new capacity. Our country can no longer afford the cost of inaction as our bridges continue to age and deteriorate. Please support H.R. 3999, The National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act.

Thank You,

JOHN KRIEGER,
Staff Attorney, U.S. Public Interest Research Group.

NATIONAL STONE, SAND & GRAVEL ASSOCIATION,
July 15, 2008.

Hon. JAMES OBERSTAR,
Chairman, House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN OBERSTAR: On behalf of the National Stone, Sand & Gravel Association (SSGA) I wish to commend you for your continued efforts to address the nation's bridge maintenance and repair problems so tragically highlighted by the Minnesota bridge collapse. NSSGA joins our coalition partners in supporting H.R. 3999, the ''National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act.''

A key part of the problem facing the nation's transportation system is that it is old with over half of the bridges built before 1964. Interstate bridges, which were primarily constructed in the 1960s, are at the end of their service lives (estimated to be 44 years for bridges built at that time). NSSGA supports the key goals of the legislation that establishes a risk-based priority for replacing bridges along the National Highway System and improving the bridge inspection program. This legislation will ultimately make travel safer and more efficient for all users as older bridges are upgraded to current safety standards and are rebuilt to accommodate increases in traffic.

As you are aware, from 1990 to 2005, there has been a 19 percent increase in the nation's population, a 39 percent increase in vehicle miles traveled, but only a 4 percent increase in highway capacity. As you are also aware, a number of reports, including the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue

Study Commission final report, detail the need for additional funding for the nation's infrastructure along with a suggestion for restructuring the Department of Transportation. H.R. 3999 is a positive step forward in addressing the nation's aging surface transportation infrastructure.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, NSSGA is the largest mining association by product volume in the world and represents the crushed stone, sand and gravel- or aggregate-industries. Our member companies produce more than 90 percent of the crushed stone and 70 percent of the sand and gravel consumed annually in the United States. More than three billion tons of aggregates (or 2.95 billion metric tons) were produced in 2007 at a value of approximately $21 billion, contributing nearly $38 billion to the GDP of the Unites States. Without these important materials, the nation's infrastructure could not be built or maintained, and the commerce and quality of life would be severely reduced. The aggregates industry workforce is made up of about 118,000 men and women. Every $1 million in aggregate sales creates 19.5 jobs, and every dollar of industry output returns $1.58 to the economy. With over 11,000 operations nationwide, most Congressional Districts are home to multiple operations.

NSSGA looks forward to working with you and our coalition partners to advance the bridge initiative to improve the safety and stability of the nation's transportation infrastructure.

Sincerely,

JENNIFER JOY WILSON,
President & CEO.

TRANSPORTATION TRADES DEPARTMENT, AFL–CIO
Washington, DC, July 16, 2008.

Re: Support the National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE: On behalf of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL–CIO (TTD), I urge you to vote in favor of the National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act (H. R. 3999) when it is considered by the House. This important measure will improve the safety of American bridges and decrease the chance of another catastrophic bridge collapse like the one we witnessed almost a year ago in Minneapolis.

H.R. 3999 will improve bridge safety and invest in the reconstruction of structurally deficient bridges. Specifically, the bill requires the federal Department of Transportation (DOT) to create a risk-based approach to safety so that states may focus attention on bridges in need of rehabilitation and replacement. In order to receive federal assistance, states will be required to create a five-year performance plan for highway bridge inspection, rehabilitation and replacement specifically for federal-aid highway bridges which are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete.

For years, our nation's infrastructure has suffered from an appalling lack of investment. The state of our nation's highway bridges is just one example of what happens when we neglect key aspects of our transportation system. According to the DOT, one out of every eight bridges in the United States is structurally deficient. While this classification does not immediately imply that a bridge will collapse, structurally deficient bridges require significant maintenance and repair to remain in service and eventual rehabilitation or replacement.

H.R. 3999 will ensure that bridges are being properly inspected and facilities in need of improvement are identified and prioritized. In addition, the bill authorizes $1 billion to repair, reconstruct and replace structurally deficient bridges. While this money will not fully meet the needs to fix existing bridge deficiencies, it does represent an important down payment and will provide immediate assistance to states in desperate need of bridge repair funding.

As we witnessed in Minneapolis, a bridge collapse can have horrific consequences. In addition to the 13 people killed, it is estimated that road user costs totaled $400,000 per day in travel time delays and increased operational costs. Overall, the state's economy lost $61 million for 2007 and 2008 as a result of the collapse. Transportation workers and American motorists depend on a safe and reliable highway network. It is clear that we must do more to support this system.

Again, I urge you to pass H. R. 3999 and to ensure that this bill becomes law as quickly as possible. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me or Brendan Danaher at 202/628–9262.

Sincerely,

EDWARD WYTKIND,
President.

THE ASSOCIATED GENERAL CONTRACTORS OF AMERICA,
Arlington, VA, July 21, 2008.

Hon. JAMES OBERSTAR,
Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC), I am writing in support of H.R. 3999, the National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act of 2008. As a targeted, nationwide bride repair and reconstruction program, your initiative would provide another $1 billion in critically-needed federal resources for states to continue efforts to better identify and address their most at-risk bridges.

Nearly one year after the tragic collapse of a span of the I–35 bridge in Minneapolis, which brought national attention to the state of the nation's bridges, the country continues to under invest in its transportation infrastructure. In 2007, in response to this tragedy, Congress provided an additional $1 billion for states to begin addressing their most at-risk bridges; however, estimates show that the problem is much more widespread—more than a quarter of the nation's bridges have structural problems or fail to meet current design standards. State departments of transportation have undertaken additional inspections and emergency repairs to ensure there are not imminent failures, yet the system still needs an infusion of $65 billion to repair or replace the significant number of bridges that are 50 years or older.

In addition, states are struggling to keep pace with the rising prices of many construction inputs: asphalt prices have more than doubled since the beginning of 2008, with increases of as much as 40 percent announced in many regions since July 1; on-highway diesel fuel costs have risen 68 percent in the past 12 month; reinforcing steel (rebar) has roughly doubled since the beginning of 2008; and the price of construction plastics, such as polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipe and plastic fencing and moisture barriers, have risen 10 to 25 percent since early 2008.

While bridges are a vital link in the nation's transportation network, they are but one component of the intermodal system that supports our $14 trillion economy. Likewise, other system needs exist and require solutions to address a variety of mobility challenges. Unfortunately, the Minneapolis tragedy is but a symptom of a bigger, looming infrastructure crisis in this country which involves all modes of infrastructure in addition to surface transportation, including aviation, water infrastructure, flood control, and navigation. Recognizing the committee's hard work to address these needs through other legislative efforts, your bridge initiative is an important first step towards fixing the long-term neglect of our nation's aging and deteriorating infrastructure.

Again, AGC strongly supports H.R. 3999, and looks forward to working with you to enact this worthy legislation.

Sincerely,

STEPHEN E. SANDHERR,
Chief Executive Officer.

AMERICAN COUNCIL ON ENGINEERING COMPANIES,
Washingon, DC, July 15, 2008.

Hon. JAMES OBERSTAR,
Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Washington, DC.

MR. CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC)—the voice of America's engineering industry—I wanted to express our strong support for H.R. 3999, the National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act and applaud your leadership in addressing the shortcomings of our national bridge program.

ACEC member firms are involved in every aspect of bridge planning, design and inspection. As you know, ACEC members testified before your committee and others about the need for a risk-based approach to bridge inspections and repair and rehabilitation decisions. Thank you for incorporating our recommendations into the bill. Improving existing inspection procedures and techniques, as called for in H.R. 3999, will allow states and the federal government to better allocate limited resources. The bill rightly calls for priority consideration based on safety, serviceability, and the impact on regional and national freight and passenger mobility.

ACEC strongly supports the requirement in the bill that bridge program managers and critical bridge inspection team leaders be licensed professional engineers. While we recognize the value of experience in bridge inspections, there is no replacement for the rigorous education, testing and standards for professional licensing. We firmly believe that a licensed professional engineer, qualified to practice structural engineering, should be in ''responsible charge'' of every bridge safety inspection.

Finally, ACEC appreciates the inclusion of a $5 million grant program to evaluate the effectiveness, accuracy and reliability of advanced condition assessment inspection processes and technologies. As noted in our testimony, inspectors are often limited in time and resources to visual or other simple inspections that provide only an immediate snapshot of bridge conditions, existing and emerging deficiencies, and any potential hazards. Significant safety improvements can be found in emerging technologies such as fiber optic, vibrating wire, acoustical emissions, and peak strain displacement for monitoring and evaluating the structural health of a highway bridge. The pilot program in the bill will help move these technologies forward.

For these reasons, ACEC supports passage of H.R. 3999. We look forward to working with you on this and other transportation infrastructure legislation in the future.

Sincerely,

DAVID A. RAYMOND,
President and CEO.

FEMA ACCOUNTABILITY ACT OF 2008

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 951, S. 2382.