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HOUSE COMMITTEE IGNORES HIGHWAY BILL VETO THREAT

By Keith Laing

The Hill

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The Republican-led House Rules Committee cleared for a final vote in the lower chamber on Tuesday a bill that would tie an extension of federal highway funding to the controversial Keystone pipeline.

The approval came despite a veto threat from President Obama issued by the White House Tuesday afternoon.

A floor vote on the highway bill extension could come as early Wednesday, the committee said after the vote.

During negotiations over the current extension of transportation funding, which is scheduled to last until June 30, the White House said it wants to avoid an interruption of transportation funding.

But the White House said Tuesday President Obama's senior advisors would recommend he veto the bill because linking transportation funding to the Keystone pipeline, which is a cross-country oil pipeline that was rejected earlier this year by President Obama, "circumvents a longstanding and proven process for determining whether cross-border pipelines are in the national interest by mandating the permitting of the Keystone XL pipeline before a new route has been submitted and assessed."

Democrats had pressed the House Rules Committee to allow an amendment that would replace the short-term transportation extension with a two-year, \$109 billion transportation bill that was approved last month by the Senate.

But the Rules Committee voted 7-3 Tuesday to allow only a trio of Republican amendments to the bill under a "structured" floor debate.

GOP aides have said the measure is intended to be the legislative language House Republicans take into a potential conference with the Senate about the highway bill. The Senate sought to pressure the House into accepting its version of the bill, but the House decided instead to pass the short-term extension of funding through June 30.

The measure became law when it was accepted by the Senate and signed by President Obama to avoid a transportation funding interruption.

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BLACK ADDRESSES HEALTH CARE, JOBS AT GALLATIN TOWN HALL MEETING

By Dessislava Yankova

Gallatin News Examiner (TN)

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Health care and job creation were some issues U.S. Rep. Diane Black addressed during a town hall meeting at the Sumner County Administration Building in Gallatin on Saturday, April 14.

Black (R-Tenn.), who visited Sumner as the last stop in her series of town hall meetings , spoke about health care options and updates including Medicare and President Barack Obama's health care plan.

"We're destroying our health care system as we know it with this reform," Black said.

Following her 30-minute presentation, Black answered question from the about 50 attendees, some of whom came from Nashville.

Several residents said Black's support of a proposed bill to increase taxes on roll-it-yourself tobacco shops conflicts with Black's perceived stance. They said an increased tax on these small vendors, about 40 in Tennessee and approximately 2,000 nationwide, would put them out of business.

"She started by saying how much she really cares about creating jobs when this bill is going to do exactly the opposite," said Sam Jeffres, 25, a smoker, who questioned Black's stand on the issue first. "That bill will shut down jobs in Tennessee and take money out of people's pockets.

"I think she is more interested in protecting the corporations than people who're trying to create innovative business here in Tennessee and help the community. I find it hard to believe that she actually cares about the people she claims to care about: the regular Americans."

Black said she "feels the bill is necessary" because of fairness.

"I believe if you have a product, it should be taxed equally all the way across the line and when you tax one part of the industry differently than you tax another part of the industry, that is creating a problem...and is unfair," Black said. "I don't think that the government should choose winners and losers. "

Matt Corenswet, who co-owns a roll-it-yourself shop, disagreed.

"She's talking about fairness, and we should pay the same taxes as Marlboro," Corenswet said. "How do you see that as fair that we pay the same taxes as Marlboro? We're not a manufacturer. We just provide the product. It's big businesses trying to shut down the little guy."

Both Corenswet and Jeffres said they were not happy with the answers they received.

"We drove all the way here from Nashville and it was very unsatisfying because she obviously avoided answering our questions," Jeffres said.

Hendersonville resident Cheryl Lund addressed battling the deficit.

"Each party wants their way, but they need to find what's best for the country not for the party," said Lund, who supports Black's views. "I don't think (Congress') deficit plan is very good because it's over a 10-year (period), and over 10 years, they always come up with new spending, which increases the deficit."

"If Democrats and Republicans don't compromise on ways to cut down our spending, the deficit will continue to grow, and we'll end up like Greece," Lund continued. "I like Diane Black, and I feel she's looking out for the good of the country and she's a good representative for us, but I don't feel I got a good answer."

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<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20120417/GALLATINO1/304170031/Black-addres>