

## **Rep. Young's remarks as prepared:**

“In January 2001, I became the Chairman of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, a position I held for six years.

“This Committee, as many of you know, is the largest Committee in the House of Representatives with oversight over all modes of transportation – from aviation, highways, railroads, to our public buildings, waterways and emergency management.

“As a Congressman representing Alaska, I worked hard on these issues for my home state. I worked with our Governor, the State Legislature and local officials.

“As Chairman, it was also my responsibility to address the transportation needs of our entire Nation. As Chairman, I worked with officials throughout the country – Governors, mayors, transportation officials, and of course, all other 434 Members and the Delegates of this body.

“As we prepared for the writing of the national transportation bill, Members of my Committee and I traveled extensively throughout the country at the request of House Members and state and local officials.

“For the thousands and thousands of transportation projects requested of us, I visited as many communities as possible to meet with Members, local officials and the public to discuss these requests.

“In 2004, Florida Gulf Coast President William Merwin commissioned a study of road improvement that would increase the University's ability to cope with a hurricane or other disaster. One of the recommendations in the report was for the construction of an on-ramp from Coconut Road to I-75.

“In February 2005, the City of Bonita Springs hired a consultant to determine if an interchange at Coconut road and I-75 would improve traffic congestion on Bonita Beach Road, Corkscrew Road, Old 41, I-75 and Coconut Road. The study determined that the Coconut interchange would take 9,000 cars off Bonita Road and Corkscrew Road each day, but add about 6,000 per day to Coconut Road.

“In February 2005, I was invited by a Congressional colleague who was a Member of the Transportation Committee, to visit his district in Florida to hear the needs and concerns of the local constituents. On February 19<sup>th</sup>, a town hall meeting was held at Florida Gulf Coast University, whose arena also serves as a hurricane shelter.

“This town hall meeting was attended by more than 200 local constituents, transportation officials, and elected officials. One of the issues discussed at the town hall meeting was the need for a hurricane evacuation route to ensure that people could get to safety more quickly during a natural disaster.

“This project was to be an interchange from the heavily traveled I-75 highway to Coconut Road, which leads to the Florida Gulf Coast University in Bonita Springs.

“At the town hall meeting, University President William Merwin spoke of the need for a research center at the university that would focus on transportation improvements using new technologies. He also presented a study showing the need for an interchange at Coconut Road to help hurricane evacuees reach the two main shelters in south Lee County.

“The goal was to provide \$10 million to study – not build, but study - this interchange.

“I’d also like to note, that to the credit of the Florida delegation, this area received \$81 million for the widening of the I-75 highway. This funding was totally justified and important to the area.

“The \$10 million for the Coconut Road study did not take any money or divert any funds from the \$81 million allocated for the I-75 widening. The \$10 million for the Coconut Road study was funded separately under the national highway bill.

“This interchange study has had the support of the Florida Gulf Coast University, the Technical Advisory Committee, which consisted of city and county transportation experts, and the local citizen’s advisory committee. The Bonita Springs City Council and the Regional Planning Council staff have also supported the interchange study.

“The Technical Advisory Committee and local citizens’ advisory committee voted unanimously to include the study in the long range Lee Metropolitan Planning Organization transportation plan.

“However, the Metropolitan Planning Organization voted not to include the interchange study in their long range plan. They instead wanted to transfer the \$10 million to another project involving I-75.

“While I don’t agree with this one organization’s decision, I respect it.

“It’s important to stress that this study funding did not go to any one person; it did not go to any one group of people. The funding was to go to the State of Florida if they chose to proceed with the study.

“This was always a good project. The residents of this community deserve to have a safe and efficient evacuation route for themselves in case of a natural disaster. With Hurricanes Katrina and Rita we saw first hand what happens when Americans are unable to get to safety.

“But for now, I support these residents and their wanting to put this money towards another project; I have always supported this community’s right to do what is best for them. That change is in this technical corrections bill and I support it.

“So why am I here today talking about this?

“That’s easy - I have been the subject of much innuendo concerning my intent and motivation with this project. These accusations have little, if any, connection with what actually occurred.

“I have outlined my intent and motivation on this and it is quite different than what I have been hearing lately about this study. Some in the media have made this study into being about one land owner in the area. Not one word has been mentioned about the hundreds of people who attended the town hall meeting in support of this study or about the numerous local organizations and officials who supported it.

“This study was included in the largest national highway bill in history. There were more than 6,200 high priority projects – some call them earmarks – in the bill. About half of these were sponsored evenly by Democrats and Republicans in this body; about half were sponsored evenly by Republicans and Democrats in the other body.

“These 6,200 high priority projects – earmarks – from the House and Senate totaled five percent of the entire highway bill.

“Two committees handled this bill in the House – the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Ways and Means Committee.

“Four committees worked on this bill in the Senate.

“I did not write this bill by myself. There were six Committee Chairmen and six Ranking Members, and dozens of subcommittee Chairmen and Subcommittee Ranking Members, Members of both party’s Leadership, and countless others who played major roles in this legislation.

“The 6,200 high priority projects – earmarks – were requested by virtually every Member of both parties in both Chambers.

“This body had nothing to do with the projects requested by the other body, and they had nothing to do with those requested by this body.

“This was a massive bill that was not completed until several months after the previous highway authorization had already expired. Members and staff were literally working around the clock until we were able to pass the bill in July 2005.

“As to the debate concerning the process of the enrollment of this or any other legislation, that is not a process I own or control. There are officers of the House and

Senate whose job it is to oversee this process. A Committee Chairman does not control the enrollment process.

“After all of the accusations and rumors about this bill, I hope that this helps set the record straight. However, if this body determines to pursue an investigation so be it. Let’s clear this up once and for all.”