



NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE
SENATOR MARC BASNIGHT
RALEIGH, NC 27601

June 3, 2010

Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On February 24, I wrote you a letter regarding the Herbert C. Bonner Bridge over Oregon Inlet in North Carolina. While I am sure you receive thousands of letters every day, I know this one reached you because it was hand-delivered by Congressman G. K. Butterfield to you on March 11. Like me, Congressman Butterfield recognized the dire risks to public safety that this deteriorating bridge poses to our people, and the great need to get the bridge replaced as quickly as possible.

I know, of course, that you are incredibly busy and unable to personally look into this issue, so I was pleased to hear from Congressman Butterfield that you had asked your staff to investigate what could be done to expedite this project in order to avoid any further delays that would continue to endanger the lives of North Carolina residents and visitors who cross the Bonner Bridge. Sadly, three months later, I have yet to receive any response to my concerns from you or anyone involved in your Administration. Nothing.

I cannot overstate the importance of replacing the bridge – which has been in process for more than 20 years now. As many as 10,000 people cross this bridge daily during the summer tourist season. The Bonner Bridge is the only bridge that connects Americans to one of the nation's most beautiful and visited national parks, the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. For the people and families who live on Hatteras Island, this bridge is the only lifeline to their personal and economic survival.

And today, in the midst of the most difficult economy we have seen in decades, this lifeline is disturbingly tenuous. The bridge's safety rating is a mere 2 out of 100 – far worse than the bridge that collapsed in Minnesota, killing almost a dozen people – and twice in the past 25 years, portions of the Bonner Bridge have either sagged or fallen into the inlet. Its replacement is long overdue, and it has been delayed by countless studies and reviews, by lack of cooperation by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and by an ominous cloud of threatened litigation by environmental groups.

The people of Hatteras Island are frustrated, and they should be. They play host to millions of visitors each year and have suffered as our economy has suffered. They have held out hope, but any potential for economic recovery has been thwarted by the federal government at every turn. The Bonner Bridge replacement schedule has been delayed at least three times within the past year alone – and it was after receiving news of yet another delay in February that I reached out to you with a plea for help. And I did so with a glimmer of hope that things were going to be different and that someone in our federal government would, once and for all, understand how critical this situation truly is and instruct the various federal agencies to work with our state to expedite this project.

One of the things I've always admired most about you is the care with which you filled the posts in your Administration. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, like you, are former legislators and know the importance of following up on correspondence – particularly in matters where the public's safety is at risk. I simply cannot imagine that someone in your Administration has simply cast my letter in the trash can and cast our concerns aside.

Mr. President, I was proud to vote for you and have tremendous respect and support for you, but I can summon no defense for your Administration's deafening silence on the Bonner Bridge – especially considering that Congressman Butterfield and Senator Kay Hagan have both personally discussed with members of your Administration the need to avoid any future delays on replacing this bridge.

So many people today are discouraged by the economy and angry at their government. It is hard to convince people that their government cares about them when all I can tell from this situation suggests exactly the opposite. The bridge has fallen in the water before and could do so again. It is incumbent upon all of us to do whatever we can to avoid that nightmare scenario from recurring.

Again, I respectfully ask that you direct your Administration (specifically, the Department of Interior and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) to readily and expeditiously accept the state's plan – which has already been cleared by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers – so that construction may suffer no further delays. Likewise, I respectfully request that you instruct the Federal Highway Administration to expedite all further document reviews and promptly sign the state's Record of Decision once it is finalized.

Thank you in advance for your renewed attention to this matter. I look forward to hearing back from you and your Administration.

Sincerely,



Senator Marc Basnight

cc: Governor Beverly Perdue
North Carolina Congressional Delegation