

BACKGROUND MEMORANDUM

TO: Out-of-Town Pool

FROM: White House Press Office

DATE: April 21, 2022

RE: Background on President Biden's Visit to Oregon and Washington

On the President's first trip to Oregon and Washington, he will highlight the historic economic growth and nearly 8 million jobs created as a result of his and Congressional Democrats' actions, including the American Rescue Plan and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and his Administration's work to lower costs for American families.

The President will call on Congress to pass his plan to lower health care and energy costs. But he's not waiting for Congress to act and will highlight recent actions he's taken to lower costs and give families more breathing room. Those actions from just the last few weeks include:

- A historic release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve,
- Extending the use of E15 gasoline,
- Taking 100 actions this year that would save families more than \$100 annually on their utility bills,
- Finalizing standards for cars and trucks that will allow drivers to travel further on every gallon of fuel,
- Fixing the family glitch in the ACA,
- Reducing the burden of medical debt,
- Freezing student loan payments through August, and
- Helping 3.6 million student loan borrowers move closer to debt forgiveness.

Background on Portland International Airport

Portland International Airport is the largest airport in Oregon, accounting for over 80% of the state's passenger airplane traffic. In 2019, approximately 19.8 million passengers traveled through Portland International Airport.

The airport is a major economic engine for the region, employing approximately 10,000 employees, airline workers, air traffic controllers, facilities workers, technicians, janitors, and retail workers. The airport also supports air cargo trade, such as the shipment of Nike products, semiconductor parts and equipment, and agricultural and seafood from the Pacific Northwest region. Air Cargo has grown more than 19% since 2019, due to the rise of eCommerce during the pandemic.

In addition, the airport helped facilitate the import of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) coming from China during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and helped the Oregon Health Authority ship testing kits to India.

Runway Resilience Project

The airport and the Portland region sit on the Cascadia subduction zone (a tectonic plate fault line), and are at significant risk of experiencing a major earthquake. As part of the airport's resilience planning to ensure emergency support aircraft can get in and out of the region after a major earthquake, the airport has begun design and planning work to upgrade its South runway so that the runway can survive an earthquake. The design is modeled after the runway of the Sendai airport in Japan that survived the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami.

At the request of Oregon's Congressional delegation, the Fiscal Year 2022 Omnibus included \$3.75 million toward engineering and design work through a FEMA Pre-Disaster Mitigation grant.

PDX Next

The Portland International Airport is currently undergoing a major \$2 billion improvement program called PDX Next. A core part of PDX Next is an expansion of the airport's main terminal. The PDX Next project will support more than 1,250 direct jobs through design and construction. Over 95% of this work is being performed by union workers. In addition, up to 30,000 workers are expected to contribute to PDX Next projects indirectly through offsite production of materials like beams and flooring. So far, the project has resulted in \$80 million across 278 contracts for minority, women, and veteran owned small businesses.

Among the key features of the new main terminal design is a giant, 392,000 square foot roof made out of "mass timber" that is being assembled near the airport and which the President will tour today. Mass timber is an engineered wood product that consists of multiple layers of lumber, joined together to form solid timber panels or beams to create a structurally strong and low-carbon alternative to concrete and steel. The roof was designed, sourced, and built in the Pacific Northwest by 40 Oregon and Washington landowners, mills and fabricators. In fact, some of the wood on the roof was harvested to reduce the risk of wildfires in the region.

Airport Improvement Program (DOT)

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law includes \$15 billion in funding for airport infrastructure and improvement projects. This funding is typically dedicated to airport maintenance projects. In 2022 alone, Portland International Airport will receive \$20 million in funding from this program to rehabilitate several taxiways at the airport, repave a major runway, and repair escalators, baggage claim, and elevators. According to airport officials, the significant increase in airport funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will allow them to accelerate projects on their capital plan, completing them faster and at lower cost.

Background on Lowering Health Care Costs

Since taking office, the President has taken important steps to lower health care costs and make coverage more affordable and accessible for American families. This includes:

- Enacting the American Rescue Plan, which is saving families that buy coverage through the Affordable Care Act an average of \$59 per person per month.
- Opening a Special Enrollment Period at HealthCare.gov during 2021 that allowed 2.8 million Americans to enroll in coverage.
- Running a record-breaking Open Enrollment Period for Affordable Care Act coverage in 2022, bringing total enrollment to 14.5 million.
- Quadrupling the number of in-person assisters available to help people enroll in coverage at HealthCare.gov.
- Facilitating Medicaid expansion in Missouri and Oklahoma, the 37th and 38th states to expand.
- Proposing a rule to fix the so-called “family glitch,” so that people will no longer be blocked from ACA coverage if the offered expensive coverage from a spouse or parents’ employer.

President Biden has also laid out an ambitious plan to continue to build on the ACA and lower the cost of health care, including prescription drugs. Congress should:

- Extend the American Rescue Plan savings, so that people continue to see low premiums.
- Close the Medicaid coverage gap, so that 4 million people are no longer locked out of coverage because of their state’s failure to expand Medicaid.
- Lower prescription drug costs by capping cost sharing for insulin at \$35 per month, holding drug companies accountable if they increase their prices faster than inflation, protecting seniors from runaway drug prices by capping Medicare costs to \$2,000 per year for drugs purchased at the pharmacy counter, and finally letting Medicare negotiate the price of prescription drugs.