Our big league competitors are going a different route. In parts of Canada they put 10 percent of GDP into infrastructure projects, and China invests almost as much.

With such a small investment, it is getting harder for our country to maintain the transportation system it has, much less take up new projects that would help America compete with the world's other heavyweight economies.

For example, in our State the poor condition of many roads costs the average driver almost $175 per year. There are more than 1,300 bridges functionally obsolete, and more than 400 bridges are structurally deficient. The bill for repairs will only grow and grow as Congress waits to get serious about infrastructure.

We ought to look at managing the transportation system like owning a car. Responsible car owners don't let them fall into disrepair. They change the oil, rotate the tires, and fix the transmission when it is needed. It is all part of responsible ownership. Some day, if you want to resell the car or give it to your child, the car will be in good shape. It is time for this generation to be responsible owners of America's transportation system.

The challenge in the weeks and months ahead will be to find policies that can sustain the highway trust fund for good while finding new ways to draw investment dollars into American infrastructure. Priority one, in my view, ought to be to bring private capital off the sidelines and into the game on transportation. With interest rates as low as they are today, now is the time to act.

In that regard, I wish to commend my colleague from North Dakota, Senator HOEVEN, who has joined me in just such an effort. We call them TRIP bonds, transportation and regional infrastructure projects, to get more private capital into infrastructure. Senators WARNER, BLUNT, and BENNET have tried another approach.

As Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, I say to colleagues that all of the long-term approaches will be on the table when we get over this short-term challenge this week.

Our colleague from Kentucky, Senator PAUL, has a very important idea with respect to transportation, which is to look at repatriation. Senator SCHUMER, my seatmate on the Finance Committee, has another approach. The point is that all of these promising ideas—each of which has the opportunity for bipartisan support—deserves consideration, and as Chair of the Finance Committee, I commit this afternoon to do that.

When the Committee approved the PATH Act, there was unanimous agreement to work together on a long-term solution to our infrastructure challenge. I have talked with a number of Senators on both sides, and the message is clear: The Senate is ready to act. This will not become another extender issue with Congress kicking the can down a crumbling road again and again.

I will close with this. We have an important job to do this week. I hope we will continue the Finance Committee's bipartisan work and pass the PATH Act so we can protect thousands of construction jobs and end the threat of a transportation shutdown.

Some people have said there is no time and no room for compromise with our colleagues in the House—that the House is saying, it's our way or no highway. I disagree. By working together, our colleagues in the House and the Senate can reach a bipartisan agreement very quickly, and then we will move on to the next challenge and solve our infrastructure crisis for the long term.

I yield the floor.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 5 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from North Dakota.

UKRAINE

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I wish to start with my support of the comments of the Senator from Oregon. We need to get a highway bill done this week, and I look forward to working with him, particularly on a long-term plan with some of the concepts he has put forward. We need it for our infrastructure across this great Nation. Again, I look forward to working with the Senator in that endeavor and express my thanks.

I rise to speak on the issue of Ukraine and the need to address that situation and address it with a long-term strategy.

Last week Russian separatists shot down a Malaysian airliner with 298 souls on board. Innocent people were killed because Russia wants to control Ukraine—if not all of Ukraine, certainly Eastern Ukraine.

The Obama administration is struggling to respond. President Obama talks about the need for Vladimir Putin and Russia to be accountable. Meanwhile, Russia continues to deny what is going on. Putin continues to arm Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine, separatists led by Russian special forces, military operatives armed and directed by Moscow.

We need to respond. Our country needs to respond, and we need to respond with a long-term strategy and not just talk and not a short-term strategy, and that is something we can do. We can respond, and we need to respond with a long-term strategy.

We can lead with strong sanctions against Russia—sanctions that would truly affect the banking sector and other sectors of their economy in a meaningful way. We can help Europe follow us with these same sanctions. We can help them by providing energy to the European Union.

Europe is dependent on Russia for its energy. I brought some charts to depict the situation. The first chart shows countries in Europe and how many of them get all or a very large share of their natural gas from Russia. So they are dependent on Russia for their energy, and that is an incredible source of strength for the Putin regime.

Here we see—I know it is somewhat difficult—all of these pipelines coming out of Russia through Ukraine and into the European Union, supplying all of that energy to these European countries. Because of that, we see all of these countries that are dependent on Russia. That is an incredible source of strength and power for Russia, and it is holding up Europe from engaging in the kinds of sanctions that could really stop Russia—stop the Russian economy and stop President Putin in his tracks.

We can break that trend and we can break that stranglehold by allowing more LNG—liquefied natural gas—exports from our country. We have the companies right now, today, that want to build LNG export facilities, but they are being held up from doing so.

I wish to go to my third chart. This isn't all of them, but right here there are 16 companies—13 on our coast, 3 in Canada—and 1 of these actually has received conditional approval. But here are 13 applications for companies that want to build LNG facilities to export natural gas, and they are being held up. All of these have been held up somewhere between 1 and 2 years. They can't even get permitted or approved by the Department of Energy to build those facilities.

What are we talking about? Let me give a specific example of one of them—a company my colleagues have probably heard of—ExxonMobil. They want to build a $10 billion facility at Sabine Pass in Texas. I just pointed this one out on this chart right here, in this area on the gulf. They are ready to go right now. They have been in the application process for maybe 1 or 2 years, and they think they are maybe halfway through it. So they have another year or 2 years before they can build a $10 billion facility that will move natural gas. They will bring it right into the UK, right into Europe. Why aren't we green-lighting this right now, today? Why do we continue to hold this up?

Some critics say it is going to take them some time to build it. Well, of course it is going to take some time to build, but the faster we get these projects permitted, the sooner they are going to get built. The reality is they will not only have an impact as they are able to move gas into the market, they will have an impact today because those European countries will know these other sources of supply are coming.

Also, Vladimir Putin knows we are serious about providing alternative energy to Europe, and I think that will make a big difference in terms of strengthening the European countries' readiness to join us with the kinds of sanctions we need to truly make a difference.

Two weeks ago I introduced legislation to do exactly what I am talking about—the North Atlantic Energy Security Act. The cosponsors include Senator MCCAIN, Senator BARRASSO, and Senator MURKOWSKI, who is the ranking member on the energy committee. Senator BARRASSO worked to put a lot of the legislation together. Senator MCCAIN has always been very active in the Ukrainian situation. Together we put together this bill with a lot of pieces of this legislation that have already been passed in the House—already passed the House. Quite simply, it will enable us to produce more natural gas, move it to market, and export it to our allies. It increases onshore production of natural gas. It allows us to gather it and move it to market, and it allows it to be exported.

Quite simply, what does that enable us to do? Well, States such as mine today are flaring off, burning off $1.5 million a day of natural gas because we don't have a market for it. So we just burn it. We just burn it because we can't get the kind of legislation we have developed passed. We can't get it to the floor for a vote. So instead of taking that natural gas—millions of dollars a day—that is going up in smoke and moving it down to these facilities and over to our allies, we are burning it.

It would be better for our economy. It would create jobs. It would be better for our environment. It would create jobs. It would certainly be better for our economic growth. It would create revenues to deal with the debt and deficit without raising taxes—just through economic growth. It would make a big difference for the national security of our country and our allies. It is common sense. What are we waiting for? Let's get beyond just talking about what needs to be done in Ukraine and let's get going. Let's get going with a long-term strategy.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. I ask unanimous consent to speak for 5 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I wish to subscribe to the views of my colleague from North Dakota on the importance of developing our great resource of natural gas and turning it into a liquefied form and solving a lot of the problems we face around the world. I also commend Senator HOEVEN and Senator WYDEN for the exchange they had briefly a few moments ago on a bipartisan approach to funding our infrastructure problems in the immediate and in the long-term sense.

I note, as I move to the topic of ObamaCare, the absence of any such bipartisan accord during 2009 when the Affordable Care Act was being debated in the Senate. Thus, we have what in April of 2003 Senate Finance Committee Chairman Baucus called a huge train wreck. He was right in seeing the train wreck coming on the rollout of the Web site, but it also has turned out to be a train wreck in far more ways than the Web site glitches and the ultimate fiasco.

The train wreck of the affordable health care act continues in the way the law is affecting health care coverage and the way it is affecting the pocketbooks of American families. These families were flatly told their health care premiums would go down. They were not told their health care premiums would moderate; they were told their health care premiums would go down. Instead, we have all of the problems we are facing with regard to ObamaCare in the way it affects women, in the way it affects wage-earners, and in the way it affects people who are looking for full-time employment. Frankly, the ObamaCare law continues to drag down our economy and our chances for economic growth.

Instead of seeing premiums drop by $2,500 on average each year as President Obama promised, families and individuals are spending more of their hard-earned dollars on health care costs under this so-called Affordable Care Act. The sticker shock will only worsen, and it is going to happen right around the corner.

In recent weeks several States have announced preliminary estimates for next year's premiums. The Wall Street Journal reports that many of these States' largest health insurers plan to increase premiums by between 8.5 percent and 22.8 percent. These are annual increases coming up right around the corner of 8.5 percent up to 22.8 percent. For many Americans, this means either paying a lot more or simply not being able to have coverage at all. The administration is trying to downplay the costs, but it is clear that once again ObamaCare is failing to live up to its billing.

Some States are particularly vulnerable to higher rates next year because of low enrollment among young adults or because few insurers have joined the exchanges. For example, in my home State of Mississippi 94 percent of enrollees are eligible for Federal subsidies, which means we have little competition to drive down rates. According to this year's numbers, my home State of Mississippi already has the third highest premiums in the Nation, and we can't afford them. Competition cannot flourish when the government is involved in setting mandates for benefits and controlling rates. Without a market-based approach, which I advocated in 2009, consumers lose out on choice and cost.

Particularly hardhit by the President's health care law are women and younger wage earners. With regard to women, for example, they are more likely to pay higher out-of-pocket costs under ObamaCare with plans with high deductibles because they typically visit the doctor more. As 57 percent of the part-time workforce, women are also more likely to have their hours cut because of the employer mandate.

I note that the employer mandate is increasingly unpopular among Democrats and Republicans.

Additionally, the law's limited physician networks have forced many women to choose different specialists for themselves and their children, thus making it less convenient for these women to get care for themselves and their children.

Stories from women across the country underscore these difficult realities. Last year a woman from Columbus, MS, wrote to tell me that her original health care plan was $500 per month before it jumped to $1,500 a month because of the ACA.

One woman from North Carolina gave this reaction to unaffordable premiums. She said:

> I've never worked this hard in my life. But I'm gonna continue working every day and keep hitting the books at night. I'm just trying to keep my head above water.

Another woman from Texas who could not find an obstetrician who would accept her insurance said this:

> It was mind-numbing, because I was just sitting there thinking, I'm paying close to $400 just for me to have insurance that doesn't work. So what am I paying for?

Women make approximately 80 percent of the health care decisions in America. More choices and lower costs would give them the flexibility they need to get the right insurance plan.

With regard to younger workers, they are generally healthier but earn less, and they are faced with daunting realities because of the health care law. Specifically, younger workers are forced to pay higher premiums to subsidize coverage for older Americans.

I was contacted by a constituent from Greenville, MS, whose healthy 27-year-old son lost his health insurance because of ObamaCare. The cost of his coverage went from $70 per month to nearly $350 per month even though the benefits improved only slightly. Although this young man had health insurance for 7 years, since he was 20 years of age, he is now questioning whether he can afford it.

Finally, all Americans are affected by a health care law that destroys jobs. Last month the economy added 288,000 jobs, but only a fraction of them were full time, as we know. The Obama economy is a part-time economy. Millions of Americans want full-time work.

The President's health care law was pushed through with no bipartisan input and in defiance of public opinion. After the Massachusetts special election, this Senate should have gotten the message that we needed to regroup and rethink this disastrous law, but the majority party pushed forward regardless. So it is no surprise that the law remains deeply unpopular today. According to a recent poll, 55 percent