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NOTE TO ASSIGNMENT EDITORS AND NEWS DIRECTORS: Senator Mikulski's remarks on the Senate floor are available for broadcast quality download.

Audio of Senator Mikulski's remarks is available – here.

Video of Senator Mikulski's remarks is available – <u>here</u>.

MIKULSKI URGES SENATE SUPPORT FOR BIPARTISAN THUD APPROPRIATIONS BILL; FOCUSES ON MARYLAND IMPACTS AND TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Barbara A. Mikulski (D-Md.), Chairwoman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, today spoke on the Senate floor to urge the Senate to support the fiscal year 2014 *Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD) Appropriations Bill*, which is now being considered by the full Senate. Senator Mikulski focused on the importance of properly funding transportation safety priorities, and called for a National Transportation Safety Board review of travel conditions on the Bay Bridge in Maryland in light of recent events. Her full remarks are below:

"As the Chair of the Committee on Appropriations, I rise today to comment on this bill but also to thank and acknowledge the really important role that Senators Patty Murray and Susan Collins have played. It has been the way the Senate should operate. They've held extensive hearings at the subcommittee on America's needs on transportation, an ever-piling-up backlog that we need to address. It would accomplish several good, agreed-upon public policy goals.

"Number one, safety -- because when we're talking about roads, bridges, and the other infrastructure things in this bill, safety is our number-one priority.

"Number two, when you're building or repairing a bridge in Maryland, Maine, Washington State, or North Dakota, those people are working in the United States of America. And hopefully the supply chain, whether its asphalt or steel, is made in the United States of America. What we would do is improve the safety rates and lower the unemployment rate. And at the end of the day have something to show for it.

"So many of the American people are frustrated with us when it comes to spending because they think if they give us \$1, we'll spend \$2 and not have anything to show for it. But yet in this bill at this time, we have a legislative framework and a restrained fiscal framework to be able to move on important transportation infrastructure needs and on housing.

"The appropriate role for the federal government is to be involved in housing. Number one, promoting economic development in blighted areas, regardless of whether you're in an urban state or a rural state. The needs of North Dakota are different from the needs of Maryland. And even in my very dear state of Maryland, we have different needs in different parts of the state.

"The robust Baltimore Corridor, which is more urban, requires one set of frameworks, say for the Community Development Block Grant funding. But if you go to Garrett County in the Western part of the state that was hit by a blizzard during Hurricane Sandy or you go down to the Eastern Shore and Somerset County, that was literally flooded to dangerous proportions during Hurricane Sandy, those two counties have as high of a poverty rate as Baltimore City.

"So when we talk about the great things in this bill, what I like about it that it's funding that will meet local needs, the needs of Garrett County and Somerset County are different than the needs of Baltimore City. But what we do know is that we need jobs and we need to be able to address the needs of the people who want to be middle class and are looking for an opportunity to get there. As well as meet compelling human needs, particularly of the elderly and disabled. We in the Senate know because we're urban and rural and suburban. You meet different needs according to the location.

"In Baltimore City there is a high concentration of elderly in certain areas, and we can meet their needs through a combined effort of housing, meals on wheels and helping making sure people have coordinated services to keep them independent and healthy. When you get to the rural parts of my state, that's even harder.

"What I like about this bill is that it's really focused on rebuilding America. You know, I salute our troops. We've been in a 10-year war, and the consequences of it will be felt by the men and women who served and the taxpayer who have to pay for it for many years to come. But as we look at this, what they fought for is America. And now, we have to think about rebuilding America. As the troops come home and, hopefully, the money comes back home, we begin to show the results there. If we rebuild our infrastructure, focus on compelling human needs, I think we not only serve the nation well, but people will begin to have trust in us. That through smart approaches, restrained budgetary spending, we can get there.

"This bill is really absolutely crucial for Maryland. First, the THUD bill provides \$40 billion for highways and nearly \$9 billion for mass transit. We need that. This means that Maryland will receive \$700 million. We're not only waiting for the Federal government. The Maryland General Assembly recently increased the gas tax, which was very controversial, because of our compelling needs. Governor O'Malley and our General Assembly wanted to rise to the occasion, but they want us to rise to the occasion as well.

"As we look at these projects, they affect not only the state of Maryland, but also the region and the nation. Madam President, you weren't here when we had a horrific accident in 2009 at the Metro. The Metro crash was terrible – brakes failed, safety systems failed, a lot failed. Nine people lost their lives. We said then that we were going to create a safety culture and turn to our national transportation safety board to be able to do it. I made two promises to the families – that I would do everything I could to see what were appropriate federal safety standards, and to put money in the federal checkbook to improve that safety. I demanded reforms at metro from management to a culture of safety.

"So where are we now? Guess what? We have put money in the federal checkbook for \$150 million to continue to buy the important crash resistant cars that will be able to help them. The money will be used for signal improvement, rail car maintenance and making sure that we are improving this. Safety is a number one obsession for me.

"In addition to working on Metro, I know this bill deals with the FAA's contract tower program, a subject of much debate during last year's Continuing Resolution proceedings. I remember a real debate with Senator Moran on how we could keep those airports open. They are the first to be hit by sequester. I've got five of them in Maryland. They're in communities like Easton. And the Frederick Municipal Airport that the President uses periodically for coming to Camp David. And also Hagerstown, Martin State, and one serving Salisbury and Ocean City. These towers are important for two reasons, national security and economic security. So we're looking at how we can make sure we keep these towers open so airplanes can come and land safely and take off safely and aid the commerce of our communities.

"But, Madam President, you've heard me also speak about housing and community development. You know, when I got started in Congress, we had something called revenue sharing. It was started by President Nixon so that local communities would get formula-based funding to help them rebuild their communities or strengthen them in the area of economic development. Well, that changed. That ended. That ended during the Gingrich era, but we came up with Community Development Block Grant money. That's again, that is money that comes locally to meet local needs, and the criteria are: eliminate blight, improve employment opportunities, and be able to create a sustainable infrastructure that you won't need government subsidies so that the community will be able to sustain itself and build on that to create jobs. We're very impressed about this.

"Again, this legislation meets needs for seniors and housing. I could go on about it, but this bill is a very important accomplishment for the state of Maryland. And when I talk about safety, I noted the Portman amendment. And Senator Cardin has an amendment on a report on lane miles and the highway bridge deck. I just want to say something else. We had some tough things happen in my state over the last couple of days on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. Many of the people in this Senate travel the Bay Bridge, some to go home to their states. You know, we're next-door neighbors with our pals from Delaware. Senators Carper and Coons, we represent the Delmarva Peninsula, a wonderful peninsula.

"The Bay Bridge now consists of two spans. Traffic volume has increased. That is a concern. And then, the velocity people travel on it has increased. And last Friday we had a terrible

situation where a truck tailgated a passenger vehicle and pushed it off the bridge. Off the bridge. The car fell 40 feet. Thank God the passenger, a young lady, survived. The impact was so hard, the glass window in the door broke, so she was able to get out. She's a fitness instructor, so she had the robust and physical vigor to be able to swim to safety. We thank God for her survival. But we are worried more than ever about safety on the Bay Bridge.

"Yesterday we had another head-on collision on the bridge. Now, the American Automobile Association has called upon the National Transportation Safety Board to review the conditions on our bridge. Are the barriers high enough? Should we be using two-way traffic now to alleviate the traffic jams because transportation is changing? In other words, they've asked very important questions related to safety. Do we need another bridge? We need analysis. If we build another bridge, should it be at the same location or farther down south?

"I cite that example because as I reviewed the facts in this case and consulted with the state, I too am considering joining with the American Automobile Association in asking for NTSB to review the accidents on the bridge and give us recommendations on what needs to be done so it doesn't happen again.

"It could have been somebody elderly. There could have been babies in that car. You cannot have cars falling 40 feet off a bridge because they are being rear-ended by a truck and think it's okay. You can't have a head-on collision and think it's okay. I don't think what's happening on the Bay Bridge is okay. I now want to work with my Governor and consider what are the best steps forward. But as of today, I am very strongly recommending a review by the National Transportation Safety Board to look at it. And it's not only what's happening in Maryland. It's what's happening all over America."

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