

# [***Opinion: There's no time for Baltimore bridge finger-pointing when livelihoods are on the line***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BS3-JCX1-DY7V-G01F-00000-00&context=1516831)

CNN Wire

April 9, 2024 Tuesday 11:42 PM GMT

Copyright 2024 Cable News Network All Rights Reserved

**Length:** 965 words

**Byline:** Opinion by Larry Hogan

**Dateline:** (CNN)

**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; America may be [*politically divided at historic levels*](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/11/13/america-is-exceptional-in-the-nature-of-its-political-divide/), but there is no red or blue economy. As Congress comes back into session for the first time since the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse, leaders of both parties must recognize this truth. The fallout from this tragedy is not just a Baltimore or Maryland issue. The economic consequences of bringing one of America's most important ports to a standstill are already [*rippling across the country*](https://www.bizjournals.com/tampabay/news/2024/04/02/tampa-bay-impact-baltimore-disaster.html) for workers and consumers in states with Republican and Democratic majorities.

The March 26 collapse, following a container ship running into a bridge pillar, resulted in the loss of six lives and the destruction of a critical transportation corridor over the Patapsco River. Debris from the allision blocked access to the Port of Baltimore. This port is the [*largest entry point*](https://farmpolicynews.illinois.edu/2024/03/maryland-bridge-collapse-could-affect-ag/) in the United States for sugar and large agricultural and construction equipment such as tractors, farming combines, forklifts, bulldozers and heavy-duty trucks. Just as American farmers prepare to plant their crops, we can't afford to lose access to the critical equipment they need to feed our country.

Impeded access to the port also has a profound impact on the automobile market as Baltimore is a critical national entry point for cars and trucks, [*handling*](https://www.1012industryreport.com/supply-chain/louisiana-auto-industry-braces-for-disruption-with-port-of-baltimore-closure/) 850,000 just last year. After years of [*supply chain challenges*](https://www.supplychainbrain.com/blogs/1-think-tank/post/37191-challenges-facing-global-automotive-supply-chains) in the automobile market that harmed workers, auto dealers and hard-working families who struggled to find an affordable vehicle, even greater disruptions will be devastating. Effects from the port closure are already being felt across the auto industry nationwide, such as in [*Louisiana*](https://www.1012industryreport.com/supply-chain/louisiana-auto-industry-braces-for-disruption-with-port-of-baltimore-closure/) and [*Florida*](https://www.bizjournals.com/tampabay/news/2024/04/02/tampa-bay-impact-baltimore-disaster.html).

This isn't a theoretical problem. Over the past few years, we saw how [*supply chain disruptions*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/16/economy/supply-chain-outlook-2023/index.html) produced by a global pandemic created hardships and drove unaffordable prices. At that time, while many ports across the country faced crippling bottlenecks, the Port of Baltimore remained operational and even added container ships to pick up the slack, thanks to [*investments*](https://www.cbsnews.com/baltimore/news/gov-hogan-touts-port-of-baltimore-expansion-partnership-between-tradepoint-atlantic-terminal-investment-limited/) my administration made to expand the operations of the port. Now, this critical national resource has been at least temporarily taken off the board.

When unexpected disasters threaten our nation, Congress has traditionally stepped up to offer support in a bipartisan fashion - disasters do not discriminate between red and blue victims or districts. However, in recent years, even disaster relief has increasingly become just another partisan football, as victims of Hurricane Sandy who [*waited months for aid to be approved*](https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSBRE90R107/) remember. That cannot happen as we recover from the bridge collapse.

There is no room for [*delays*](https://www.newsnationnow.com/us-news/northeast/battle-heats-up-over-proposed-federal-funding-for-baltimore-bridge/), [*finger-pointing*](https://www.axios.com/local/salt-lake-city/2024/03/26/baltimore-bridge-dei-utah-lawmaker-phil-lyman-misinformation) or [*crazy conspiracy theories*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/28/politics/baltimore-bridge-collapse-conspiracy-theories/index.html). Saner heads must prevail. Republicans and Democrats at the local, state and federal levels must put aside their sacred cows and get this done.

First, leaders should work together to provide immediate financial support for the thousands of hard-working longshoremen and other employees related to port operations [*who are now out of work*](https://www.thebaltimorebanner.com/economy/port-of-baltimore-longshoremen-ISQCAJ4Z65CCXNTPULHM57ZDDE/). This is not charity. It is a necessary investment to prevent this short-term challenge from creating longer-term disruptions. If these skilled workers are forced to find work elsewhere, then it will take far longer to get the port back up and running even after the channel is cleared and opened [*in the next several weeks*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/04/us/fort-mchenry-channel-timeline-baltimore-bridge/index.html).

Second, do not waste time [*debating other unrelated issues that could delay funding*](https://www.newsnationnow.com/the-hill/house-freedom-caucus-lays-out-demands-for-considering-baltimore-bridge-funding/) to remove debris from the collapse and rebuild the Francis Scott Key Bridge. Rebuilding the bridge is vital to the operations of the port and vital to Interstate 695 traffic as well, with [*12.5 million vehicles crossing the bridge*](https://www.bts.gov/current-transportation-statistics/information-about-port-baltimore) in 2023. It's critical we [*pursue the maximum possible settlement*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/28/business/who-ends-upholdingthebagfor-the-baltimore-bridge-collapse/index.html) from the operator of the ship that caused the collapse, but that cannot be an excuse for inaction. Our economy can't wait for a protracted political or legal process to extract payment before rebuilding.

Third, Congress must cut unnecessary red tape and simplify the environmental and the Endangered Species Act review to get the bridge rebuilt as quickly as possible. Some are [*already saying*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/26/us/bridge-collapse-repairs.html) that red tape will slow down the process several years. That is unacceptable. In 2022, when I was leading Maryland, we opened the new [*Nice-Middleton Bridge*](https://www.kci.com/newsroom/new-nice-middleton-bridge-opens-to-relieve-congestion-concerns/) across the Potomac, which is similar in size to the Francis Scott Key Bridge, under budget and ahead of schedule.

We should not tolerate political, legal or regulatory delays in building a bridge that is already an integral part of our economy. This doesn't mean cutting corners. We must fully comply with all environmental and safety rules, but cut out the ability for activist groups to potentially needlessly delay the process and tie it up in endless legal proceedings.

There is a clear precedent for a bipartisan approach with as few barriers as possible. In August 2007, the I-35W Mississippi River bridge in Minneapolis [*suffered a catastrophic failure and collapsed*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/27/economy/minneapolis-bridge-collapse-baltimore-lessons/index.html), killing 13 people. Within only a few days, the House and Senate unanimously passed and President George W. Bush signed into law funding to rebuild the bridge with an expedited permitting process. In just 13 months, the bridge was [*replaced and open to traffic*](https://www.mprnews.org/story/2008/09/18/new-interstate-35w-bridge-in-minneapolis-opens).

Recovering from such a disaster wasn't a partisan issue then, and it shouldn't be now. With livelihoods and our economy on the line, we must cut through the partisan nonsense, hold both parties accountable and get stuff done. That is what Marylanders and our nation really want from their leaders. This is much bigger than ***politics***. We rise and fall together as one nation. And the Francis Scott Key Bridge must rise again soon.

Opinion by Larry Hogan

TM & © 2024 Cable News Network, Inc., a Time Warner Company. All rights reserved.

**Load-Date:** April 9, 2024

**End of Document**