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Spending Should Target Infrastructure That Repays Massive Investment

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The outcome of the economic stimulus package debates now taking place in the nation's capital, as well as parallel efforts within various state governments, will have a huge impact on the lives of Americans for generations to come. Along with the current economic crisis and market uncertainties, there are also important opportunities if stimulus funds for infrastructure and research and development are spent wisely. These areas represent a relatively small portion of the overall spending, but may be the most vital in providing our country the ability to repay the cost of this monumental expenditure.

The goal of investing in the nation's infrastructure as part of the economic recovery deserves widespread support and quick action. And we must look beyond simple U.S. road and bridge infrastructure investments if we are to realize a wide-ranging and sustainable economic rejuvenation. While short-term investments provide for near-term jobs and our road infrastructure is in poor condition, we need investments in longer-term infrastructure that provide a more stable base of employment and future job growth. Strong emphasis is needed in areas that will provide the greatest returns in increased U.S. productivity and competitiveness globally, both today and in the decades ahead.

Major long-term economic benefits can be realized by developing new, sustainable infrastructure in energy, transportation and water. Every day we see examples in our country of the critical need for infrastructure that will require trillions of dollars to ensure the delivery of affordable, reliable electrical power, clean and safe water, efficient mass transportation systems and enhanced safety and security for our citizens. Having a solid infrastructure base for economic growth can only be achieved by addressing the foundational needs for a new economy. Focusing attention on these more broadly based infrastructure areas will result in new job creation not only in the basic construction industry, but also in the technology and manufacturing industries where the use of equipment that supports these needs drives a much wider base of the economy. In addition, it will provide continuing employment related to new infrastructure.

For instance, investments in our energy infrastructure can reduce our reliance on foreign energy sources, increase energy efficiency and maximize benefits to the environment. The electrical power industry requires investments that will enhance service reliability and economical power generation, transmission and distribution systems which fuel America's economic growth. The long-term delay in electric grid automation has led to inefficiencies in service delivery and higher costs to consumers and the overall U.S. economy.

New technology can reduce the rate of growth in electrical demands and thus defer, in part, the need for additional generation resources as well as transmission and distribution systems through improved monitoring, demand response and heightened grid efficiency. This approach will help utilities optimize the operation of existing assets and extend the life of investments made in these facilities. And the need to optimize our electric infrastructure will be magnified as U.S. renewable energy development expands and the number of electric-powered hybrid vehicles significantly increases.

The nation also can greatly benefit from investments that address railroad congestion and improve existing rail infrastructure that is crucial in the sustainable delivery of needed commodities across the country. In addition, expanding mass transit will improve the country's long-term economic competitiveness, as well as increasing fuel efficiency and helping address climate change.

Investments in the U.S. water industry are vital to address challenges such as aging water infrastructure, degradation of water quality, inefficient wastewater management, and the impacts of climate change. Water industry technology development is vital in ensuring that harmful chemical or biological materials continue to be removed from the nation's water supplies. In addition, developing water recycling approaches to relieve arid regions, as well as infrastructure to address pollution from storm sewers and agricultural chemical run-off are crucial to the nation's health and economic growth.

Our national, state and local leaders must take bold steps to create the infrastructure the country will need to remain competitive in the global marketplace. A nexus of issues has come together in energy, mass transit, water, safety and security as we focus on climate change, energy assurance, water scarcity, economic recession, and many other competing issues; all vital elements of a sustainable society.

The financial uncertainties must be addressed by focusing on investments that create jobs, jump-start and sustain the economy and, in the long run, provide competitive advantages that are part of the solution to repay the massive debt we are incurring. I encourage these actions that will revitalize the economy, while addressing a critical need for clean, safe water, efficient transportation and affordable, reliable energy.

Although our country is facing formidable economic challenges, there is no reason that by working together we can't overcome these issues and move on to greater prosperity. To accomplish this requires making the best investment choices that will have the greatest sustainable economic impacts in increasing our global competitiveness and creating jobs.

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