



PUBLIC EMPLOYEE Advocate

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A plan that works

President Obama's jobs plan is an investment in our communities

SCOTT LEIGH KNOWS a thing or two about the interdependence of a state's infrastructure, the vibrance of its economy, and the health and welfare of its citizens. Leigh is construction group chief for the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities' (DOT&PF) Northern Region, an expanse of 370,000 square miles—comparable in size to California, Nevada and Arizona combined.

The Northern Region DOT&PF maintains, among other things, more than 3,400 miles of roads; 70 percent of the state's National Highway System routes; 408 public buildings, including courthouses and state office buildings; 104 airports; 390 bridges; and 1,548 miles of aviation surfaces.

Continued on page 4

"All of our infrastructure needs funding," says Scott Leigh.

Bargaining news

New York members save jobs, OK four-year deal **PAGE 3**

Know the facts

Research shows public spending drives growth **PAGE 5**

State Lines

'Professors on Wheels' take lectures to nursing homes **PAGE 7**

Victory

Ohio voters reject anti-worker law **PAGE 8**

A plan that works



Continued from page 1

When President Obama unveiled legislation in September calling for investment in critical-needs areas such as infrastructure, public education and job training, infrastructure professionals like Leigh welcomed the prospects. Good infrastructure is essential, he says, to efficiently move people and goods, and ensure the health and safety of communities.

Obama's plan includes \$50 billion in immediate investments for highways, transit, rail and aviation—investments that would help modernize the nation's infrastructure, which receives a grade of D from the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Under Obama's plan, Alaska stands to get about \$220 million for infrastructure projects that could support at least 2,900 jobs.

"All of our infrastructure needs funding," says Leigh.

Reducing public investments for health, education, research and the upkeep of infrastructure will erode competitiveness.

—"GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS REPORT 2011-2012,"
World Economic Forum

The Alaska Public Employees Association member says nothing in the Northern Region is more central to the state's economy than the James W. Dalton Highway and the E.L. Patton Yukon River Bridge.

"The Dalton Highway is vital to Alaska for North Slope oil development, and it definitely needs rehabilitation," says Leigh, noting that the majority of the 400-plus-mile highway from Prudhoe Bay to just north of Fairbanks remains unpaved.

Then there is the issue of upgrading the 2,290-foot Yukon River Bridge—a must to support a new gas pipeline from the north. "Everyone is talking about a new [gas] pipeline, and getting over the Yukon River is one of the challenges," says Leigh.



AMY TABORSKY

"Infrastructure is a major issue because of the oil boom," says Mike Stebbins.

For Alaska communities, the infrastructure needs are no less important and no less in demand. DOT&PF builds evacuation roads, sanitation roads and landfill roads. It's in the process of upgrading airports to federal aviation standards.

The list of projects is endless in Alaska—and elsewhere.

Under the president's plan, Illinois would receive at least \$1.6 billion for immediate infrastructure investment, which could support more than 20,000 jobs; Kansas would receive \$360 million, supporting nearly 5,000 jobs; New York would receive nearly \$3 billion, supporting more than 38,000 jobs; and North Dakota would receive about \$177 million, supporting a minimum of 2,300 jobs. The list goes on, with every state poised to receive money from the president's plan to create jobs—and address critical infrastructure needs.

"Right now, infrastructure is a major issue because of the oil boom," says Mike Stebbins, a transportation services supervisor for the North Dakota Department of Transportation. Highway maintenance is Stebbins' job, whether it's fixing potholes or plowing snow. The North Dakota Public Employees Association member is based out of Underwood, N.D., which is halfway between Bismarck and Minot. His routes are on the edge of the oil patch.

The oil boom has boosted the state's economy but has done a number on the roads, which were built for cars and farm trucks, says Stebbins. The oil well trucks are hauling 24/7, and the "semi traffic is beating the roads

to death," he says, noting that traffic volume has doubled in the last five years on his routes.

"We've had an oil boom once before, and it went bust, so everyone was hesitant about investing in road infrastructure," says Stebbins, who has worked for the DOT for more than 23 years. "Now we are behind the eight ball."

The economics of infrastructure and other public spending

The ideological divide over the benefit of government spending has been pronounced since Obama unveiled the American Jobs Act in September.

Congressional Republican leaders were quick to denounce the plan. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) described Obama's plan as "the same wasteful spending, the same burdensome union giveaways, and the same temporary tax policy that has failed the American people."

While debate focuses on whether the nation can afford to invest in infrastructure, education and the unemployed, the real question is: Can we afford not to?

The World Economic Forum's "Global Competitiveness Report 2011-2012" indicates that the United States' edge in the world is quickly dulling. The United States ranked 5th overall, out of 142 countries, in the 2011-2012 report; in the 2008-2009 rankings, it was first.

While the slip might not seem significant, the country appears to be on a downward trajectory in many of the "12 pillars of competitiveness" that are measured, including infrastructure, primary education, and higher



education and training—the exact areas of investment targeted under Obama’s plan.

The United States is 16th out of 142 nations in infrastructure; 42nd in health and primary education; and 13th in higher education and training.

“There is no doubt that reducing public investments for health, education, research and development, or the upkeep of infrastructure will erode competitiveness over the medium to longer term,” according to the report.

Federal investment needed to spur job growth, fund critical needs

The nation is in crisis, and the one thing our country has in its first aid kit is federal investment to spur job growth and fund the nation’s critical needs.

The president’s comprehensive plan failed in the Senate in mid-October, prompting the administration and congressional allies to introduce the American Jobs Act in pieces.

On Nov. 3, the transportation infrastructure portion failed to advance in the Senate by a vote of 51-49, with all 47 Republicans and two Democratic caucus members voting no. On Oct. 20, a bill providing aid to states for teachers and first responders also failed to advance in the Senate. The vote was 50-50, with all Republicans and three Democratic caucus members voting no. Both measures would have been fully paid for by a tax increase—a fraction of 1 percent—on income above \$1 million a year.

“The American people deserve to know

why their Republican representatives in Washington refuse to put some of the workers hit hardest by the economic downturn back on the job rebuilding America,” Obama said in response, noting that 70 percent of the public supported the measure but “100 percent of Senate Republicans said no.”

“The fight is far from over,” says AFT president Randi Weingarten, noting that the components of the American Jobs Act “are not radical ideas; they are real solutions to get Americans back to work doing the work that needs to be done.”

When thousands gathered in mid-October in Washington, D.C., for the March for Jobs and Justice to honor the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., Weingarten called on the crowd to be “foot soldiers in the fight to reclaim the American dream.”

In Wisconsin, AFT member Joanne Johnson-Clauser has heard much of the dismissive spin surrounding the jobs plan—and is buying none of it.

When it comes to the effort to win passage of the jobs plan, like the battles across states to protect workers’ rights, and to fund essential public services and the jobs of the people who deliver them every day, Johnson-Clauser says the message is clear: “Never give up.”

TAKE ACTION

Go to <http://go.aft.org/JobsAct> and tell members of Congress that your community needs the jobs plan.

President Obama proposed the American Jobs Act to strengthen our economy and create jobs. How would you like to see the money and resources put to work in your community?

“Some of this money needs to be spent on our crumbling infrastructure. Our roadways, our electrical grid, and our water supplies need to be updated and improved. This would create millions of jobs.”

Michael Schmitz
Ohio

“It’s important for Congress to pass the American Jobs Act. It will put people to work, improve school buildings and improve our roadways. Our country is behind many countries. We have been spending our resources on war and letting our country fall behind. ... We need to invest in ourselves and not the world.”

Ruth Hirsch
New York

“The money should be used as outlined by the president: rebuilding roads, schools and rehiring teachers; helping those who are unemployed by extending unemployment benefits and those whose houses are ‘underwater.’”

Mary Anderson
Illinois

Public spending: A societal boon or bust?

Research shows public spending drives economic growth and development

THERE’S AN ABUNDANCE of empirical evidence that dispels the notion that public spending is “parasitic on the real productive sectors of the economy.”

Some of that evidence was presented earlier this year during an Albert Shanker Institute forum on public services and public employee unions in Washington, D.C., that featured top economists, attorneys and public opinion researchers.

“There is nothing in the empirical evidence that suggests that public spending is a burden on [economic] growth or should be regarded as impeding growth,” said David Hall, a researcher with the Public Services International Research Unit at the University of Greenwich Business School in London.

Hall presented findings from PSIRU’s re-

port “Why We Need Public Spending,” which examines more than 140 years of global economic data.

PSIRU’s findings include:

- Fifty percent of all productivity gains in the whole U.S. economy between 1930, when public spending was just over 10 percent of

The public debt didn’t cause the crisis. The crisis made the public debt rise.

—David Hall, Public Services International Research Unit

gross domestic product, and 1980, when public spending was approaching 35 percent of GDP, were due to infrastructure investment.

- The share of all income taken by the top 1 percent of people more than doubled from 8

percent in 1980 to 17 percent in 2005.

- Income inequality within a country contributes to health and social problems—and the United States is the most unequal compared with 20 countries, including many European Union members and Japan.

- Health expenditures in the United States are 16 percent to 20 percent of GDP, approximately \$7,290 per capita in 2007—nearly double the per capita costs of public health-care systems in Canada, France and Germany, and more than double the per capita costs in Japan and the United Kingdom.

“For the past 150 years, public spending has been driving economic growth and development, and rising steadily in all countries of the world,” Hall said. “Far from being a bur-

Continued on page 6