

Fortunately, the economic stimulus packages that Congress and several state legislatures are considering constitute excellent vehicles for achieving two mutually beneficial outcomes: restoring our nation's economy and fortifying our nation with climate-resilient public works.



Now is the time to fund and finance capital projects that strengthen our defenses against the rising ocean, increasingly frequent and intense rain in some parts of the country, increasingly frequent and intense droughts elsewhere, and increased temperatures everywhere.

Thanks to funding by key federal departments and agencies, including the Army Corps of Engineers, DOT, EDA, EPA, FEMA and HUD, plus corollary state, county and municipal programs, many communities across the nation have been addressing our changing climate. Numerous projects to resist climate change, or at least mitigate its effects, are on the drawing board, funded, under construction and even completed. Many more are needed.

3-Part COVID-19 Recovery

To address that need, I propose that Congress's next coronavirus economic recovery plan fund three actions:

1. A nationwide assessment of climate risk and an estimate of what capital expenditures by government will be required to reduce that threat.
2. A national design competition that convenes multidisciplinary teams of experts and community members to identify climate-resilience projects that offer the greatest protection and social and economic resilience.
3. Full funding for the design, engineering, permitting, construction, operation and maintenance of projects selected in the design competition.



Skeptics may say that funding climate resilience will dilute assistance to those community members who need it most, i.e., small businesses, laid-off employees and low-income people.

The truth is that Congress already is creating emergency financial-aid packages. Fully sensitive to the overarching challenge of the pandemic, Congress also should take additional steps to spur the economy that address the environment.

Dual Benefits

Why? Because government investment in climate resilience will create jobs in multiple industry sectors, both blue collar and white collar. Communities that have reduced their vulnerability to climate change will attract private sector investment in homes, businesses, industry, education and cultural institutions. Communities that have created a resilience-strengthened tax base will be better able to afford higher levels of medical care, social services and civic amenities than those that have not adapted.



Our nation has the opportunity to address two pressing issues: public health and climate change. Our eventual resistance to the coronavirus and return to normal life will benefit to the extent that we create a built environment and natural environment that reduces the risks of climate change.

We can make America healthier – in both ways. COVID-19 is a crisis, so let’s benefit from it as much as we can.

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