



## Why We Need The People's Budget's \$1 Trillion Infrastructure Plan

Set aside for a moment concerns about political gridlock on Capitol Hill. Think about the actual gridlock that could await lawmakers and citizens on their way to Capitol Hill.

Earlier in March, Washington area residents learned that one of the major bridges in the city – one that carries about 70,000 vehicles a day past the iconic Lincoln Memorial to either downtown Washington or the Virginia suburbs – will have to be shut down in five years without a \$250 million reconstruction. It's a federal bridge, but Republicans who control Congress so far aren't appropriating the money for the needed reconstruction.

One less bridge crossing into Washington would be devastating to a city that already ranks as the most congested in America, according to the Texas A&M Transportation Institute. It's a high-profile example of what Americans experience around the country: **58,000 bridges around the country are rated as structurally deficient, from the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City to some of the Interstate 405 bridges in Los Angeles.** And it's not just bridges, as the people struggling with the consequences of decades-old lead pipes in Flint, Michigan and other communities around the country are now discovering.

In 2015 Congress passed, and President Obama signed, a bill that partially addressed the nation's need for long-term infrastructure spending. But even the most enthusiastic proponents of that bill said that the legislation barely makes a dent in what we need just to bring our transportation network up to minimum 21st-century requirements. **We haven't begun to seriously tackle the water crisis so vividly unmasked by the Flint, Michigan lead fiasco, or the public investments we should be making in areas ranging from sustainable energy to high-speed Internet.**

That's where the fiscal 2017 People's Budget introduced by the Congressional Progressive Caucus comes in. **The People's Budget includes a bold, \$1 trillion plan over 10 years to invest in the nation's infrastructure. It is the only policy proposal that comes close to the level of infrastructure investment called for by leading experts, such as the American Society of Civil Engineers.**

It is also a comprehensive plan. For example, it includes \$150 billion to cover the cost of replacing aging water pipes around the country. In addition to the dangers posed by lead pipes that are still being used even though they have been outlawed in new construction since the 1990s, there's the reality of costly water main breaks. (One industry source calculates that there are on average around the country 850 water main breaks every single day, running up repair costs of \$3 billion a year.)

**An additional \$150 billion would be invested to upgrade the nation's energy grid to better accommodate renewable energy sources, such as solar panels on residences that can feed energy into the power grid during the day.** In transportation, the People's Budget would steer more dollars to address the increased demand for public transportation, bikeways and walkways in reviving urban areas, as well as reverse the nonsensical opposition from conservatives to building out high-speed intercity rail.

**The budget anticipates that this plan would create 3.6 million new jobs.** Even though right now the national unemployment rate is officially 4.9 percent, the nation is still 1.6 million jobs below what it would have been had the job market not been devastated by the 2008 Wall Street crash, according to The Hamilton Project.

But that's not the only reason this job-creation plan is important. **There are broad disparities, by race and region, in unemployment. African-American unemployment was above 10 percent in at least 22 states around the country in 2015; in Connecticut, Iowa, Minnesota, Nevada and the District of Columbia, black unemployment rates were above 13 percent.** There are also 35 metropolitan areas in the United States with unemployment rates of at least 7 percent or higher in states that include California, Arizona, New Jersey, Washington and Illinois. These pockets of high unemployment still left behind by the economic recovery years after it began will not rise on their own; they need a national commitment to rebuild America that is designed to give them the extra boost they need.

Fortunately, it's not difficult to imagine how an infrastructure program of this scale and breadth could put the left behind at the head of the line. That can happen through such projects as high-speed rail in California, solar installations in Arizona and the Sunbelt, bus and rail car manufacturing in the Midwest and water pipe replacement projects in Northeast cities.

Another reason to push for this infrastructure investment in the People's Budget is as an insurance policy against what could be a looming global recession. **Austerity policies imposed by a Republican-controlled Congress demonstrably slowed growth in the United States below what it would have otherwise been.** But what we experienced in the U.S. is nothing compared to the stagnation experienced in European countries that took the counsel of their conservative and corporatist factions and cut government spending instead of making investments that would have led to a more financially secure working class. Now the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development last month urged the world's largest economic powers to use their ability "to borrow for long periods at low interest rates" to increase spending in order "to strengthen demand" in the face of signs of a global economic slowdown.

That's a warning that is not being heeded by the Republican presidential candidates and by the Republican leadership in Congress. They are all united in a pledge to double down in 2017 and beyond on a combination of spending cuts on everything but military spending, and tax cuts mainly directed at corporations and the wealthy. In the face of a recession, taking government demand out of the economy is a recipe for economic catastrophe.

That's why the spending plan advanced in the People's Budget needs to be a core issue in the 2016 election campaign. It is true that this budget has no realistic chance for passage in a Republican Congress. But this isn't simply about a short-term budget fight. This is about whether we have a president and an electorate united in moving forward a sane economic platform that will strengthen the American economy in the uncertain years ahead, or if we will allow the ideologues and big-money interests to succeed in taking the wheels of the American economy and driving us all off a cliff. **Yes, the People's Budget is audacious. But that's only**

**because in these times, given how much more ground working people must make up to compensate for decades of economic inequity, we need audacious solutions**, along with a grassroots movement to encourage a corresponding level of audacity from our next president.

To help build that movement, sign on as a citizen co-sponsor of the People's Budget. The Campaign for America's Future has joined a coalition of organizations seeking to recruit hundreds of thousands of citizen co-sponsors. That would send a clear message to House Democrats that they should unite behind this budget when it comes up for a vote later this month, and to House Republicans that there is no broad mandate for their bankrupt policies.