

THE GROUNDWORK AHEAD

BY DONNA F. EDWARDS

President Obama called on Congress to help generate 80 percent of our energy use through clean energy sources by 2035, invest significantly in our nation's crumbling infrastructure, and expand innovation through research and development. These are the right priorities for Congress and the American people. These priorities offer a significant chance to create jobs and grow our economy in the short term while also laying the foundation for long-term economic development and global competitiveness in the coming decades. The American people simply can no longer afford an outdated energy policy with 85 percent of our energy consumption coming from fossil fuels, an infrastructure system graded as a "D" by American engineers, and a research and development tax credit that ranks 17th in the world and that does little to promote innovation and domestic manufacturing. We must do better.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE CAN REDUCE OUR ENERGY CONSUMPTION, CREATE JOBS, AND PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND LONG-TERM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

One platform presents President Obama and Congress with an opportunity to address all three of these initiatives: green infrastructure—using the natural environment for clean water, flood control, and stormwater management. Green infrastructure can reduce our energy consumption, create jobs, and promote environmental stewardship and long-term economic development. The evidence confirms this conclusion. In my own congressional district, Maryland's 4th, Edmonston, Maryland, secured federal funds to incorporate green infrastructure techniques into the city's main street. The funds brought good jobs, sustainable flood control, low-cost LED streetlights, and quality of life improvements to the residents of Edmonston. In California, the Sun Valley Watershed is an alternative to a \$42 million concrete drain intended to eliminate flooding in the Sun Valley. With funding from 20 state and federal agencies, the multipurpose project returned \$100 million in savings in recaptured water, cleaner air, and reduced waste hauling.

We know there are tangible benefits to investing in green infrastructure, but more must be done to learn about the best green infrastructure practices and to create incentives for future projects. That is why I am championing the Green Infrastructure for

Clean Water Act, which I plan to introduce in May. This legislation would establish up to five regional centers for studying green infrastructure in the United States. The centers would be charged with conducting research on green infrastructure relevant to the geographic region where the center is located. Communities would receive training and technical assistance on how to implement the best green infrastructure management practices. To move forward, we must assess the broad, positive implications of green infrastructure and low-impact development. We know different regions will require nuanced policies. My legislation will be instrumental in developing those policies and ensuring that projects maximize the benefits for communities.

The bill would also create funding incentives to help communities develop green infrastructure technologies and would require the Environmental Protection Agency to examine how green infrastructure approaches can be incorporated into clean water programs. Investments in infrastructure, innovation through research and development, and clean energy use—these are priorities that President Obama has set for the 112th Congress, and these are the priorities captured in my legislation.

The United States stands at an important moment in its history. Right now, China is implementing a \$100 billion infrastructure investment plan, the European Union is investing €4 billion in its space agency, and Brazil is overhauling its tax code to streamline investments, particularly in education. The United States cannot afford to fall behind these countries and become less competitive in the global marketplace.

Some of my colleagues are busy implementing a "cut-grow" strategy they believe will reduce economic burdens for future generations. They miss a key point. Our deficit is increased not only when we borrow money, but when we fail to make much-needed investments in our future. If we do not make critical investments now in infrastructure, innovation, and education, we burden future generations of Americans. Government must play a role in improving our economic competitiveness. Green infrastructure is a great place to invest, and I look forward to pursuing it vigorously in the 112th Congress. ●

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