

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

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Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA

Decline in Investment

Some people have a very narrow view of infrastructure. Our union has a very broad view of infrastructure. It's everything that you could imagine: mass transportation, water treatment facilities, water moving facilities, roads, bridges, airports—I could even throw education into the infrastructure if I want to really broaden it. If you look out across the country, the decline of American investment in maintaining and upgrading its infrastructure has been a 30-year problem, and you can see the results of that. In the winter you'll see frozen and bursting pipelines, whether it's gas lines, water lines. You can see the bridges that are condemned—and take for example the area that I live in, Allegheny county—there's a number of bridges that are not passable by heavy trucks, so those trucks have to take truck route detours that add to their cost, it adds to pollution. So if you use American taxpayer dollars to build and repair and upgrade that infrastructure, you should be using American-made products.

We've Been Conned

The reality is that we've systematically ignored roads and bridges and we've been conned, I would argue, into the concept of unduly small government, and that the government can't do anything right and that kind of malarkey. The fact of the matter is, the only real vehicle for building and maintaining and enhancing infrastructure is the government. We wouldn't have had the national highway system if we had waited for the private sector to do it. We wouldn't have a national water treatment system if we had waited for the private sector to do it. So I think people have been conned into ignoring their infrastructure and too many people take a very narrow view of infrastructure. Some people think it's simply roads and airports. Our union views it much much broader than that. So my view is that the American public has been caught in the confusion between so-called small government/privatization and a narrow view of what infrastructure is.

Partisan Roadblocks

If we look at the events of the last 4+ years, every infrastructure initiative that the administration has put forward or the democratic leadership has put forward has been blocked. And it's been blocked by one party. So we can't just pretend we're going to be bipartisan when the decision-making has become very partisan. Look at what the president and his administration wanted to do and move forward with high-speed rail. We've seen that blocked on the state level by republican governors that wouldn't accept that they would have high-speed rail. If you look at what's happened on water infrastructure, if you look at what's happened on trying to fund bridge repairs. The

president actually went through the bridge that connects Ohio to Kentucky and pointed out how that bridge was in need of repair and the republican house, led by John Boehner, and the republican senate with minority leader Mitch McConnell, both opposed the investment in infrastructure and bridges. We've had certainly the last 4+ years where the administration has tried to advance infrastructure programs they've been stymied as much as the other side could do it.

Infra Investment Creates Wealth

Our union has 850,000 members and we work really hard at promoting infrastructure. We work very hard at promoting domestic manufacturing. We actually believe that manufacturing is where real wealth is created, not by manipulating coupons or collateral debt offerings, and that the best way to enhance manufacturing is by having the broadest-based investment in infrastructure, in mass transit, in fixing roads and bridges, water treatment plants, as I said, airports. You go to Washington National Airport, the nation's capital, and they don't have enough gates for the airplanes. You go to most of the major airports and they don't have enough systems in air traffic towers to maintain all the air traffic turmoil that's out there. I mean everything that we have is now falling down to become almost second rate. At the union I get the privilege of attending, I should say, a number of global meetings in different countries, and it's surprising how much more sophisticated their transportation systems are, how much more sophisticated their infrastructure is than ours.

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