



AMERICAN COUNCIL OF ENGINEERING COMPANIES

Now is the time to leverage investment in our critical infrastructure

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The scope of the coronavirus pandemic is something we haven't experienced in our lifetime. Each of us has been recruited to fight an unseen enemy that is disrupting our lives, businesses, and overall economic health.

State and local leaders have called on President Trump to put the nation on a wartime footing. In response, the administration is speeding production of medical supplies and tasking the military to assist states with expanding hospital capacity. Congress is putting partisanship aside to act on historic stimulus relief for employers and their displaced employees.

In such a time of crisis, maintaining the nation's critical infrastructure is also essential. Not only facilities currently in service, but those that are in development. Our retail and food supply chains rely on the capacity of our highways, airports and ports. They must remain open so rail operators, cargo shippers and truckers can deliver much-needed medical supplies, personnel and goods where they are most needed. The continuity of our power grid, water systems and utilities – the building blocks of public health – also cannot be disrupted. Each of these efforts requires national coordination and a will to keep America open for business.

Each of these systems also relies on the critical involvement of America's engineering industry and its essential role in keeping America moving. In everyday life, engineers are the unseen force that designs the modern world and all the associated conveniences we take for granted. In times of crisis, our industry remains an indispensable resource for continuity of government and the economy.

Currently, segments of the engineering industry are working with health care clients to mobilize in response to the coronavirus. They are working hand in glove with construction firms to design new temporary testing and triage centers and to retrofit existing facilities to handle more hospital beds.

Additionally, engineering firms are aiding the government by leveraging data to maintain situational awareness during this crisis. Many more engineering firms are working with the lead crisis agencies that are responding on the front lines of the pandemic and have been called into service by FEMA, and the Army Corps of Engineers, and others at a moment's notice.

The partnership between the engineering industry and America's public health and emergency management agencies is critical to help the nation navigate successfully through this new challenge.

At the state level, however, the decision by several governors to halt infrastructure-related construction projects is counterproductive to the nation's goals and promises to extend this tremendous economic disruption. Now is not the time to shut these projects off. It's time to leverage them further. Continued progress on ongoing infrastructure projects will provide a much needed and strong economic footing when the inevitable recovery commences.

We all know one day very soon we will emerge from this predicament. The underlying economy is strong, and the recovery will be helped by ensuring that public and private sector design and construction projects continue to move forward. In particular, the engineering industry should be encouraged to design now so we can continue building later.

Congress must focus their stimulus policies to not only help those industries and citizens critically damaged by the COVID-19 response, but also to help businesses and employees regain their economic foothold—including America's engineering industry— with real assistance, such as cash flow relief by postponing payroll tax collection.

These are indeed challenging times, but we've faced challenging times before. America mobilized to win World War II, and we worked together to regain our national spirit after September 11th.

American industry played important roles in navigating the nation through those tragic events. Be confident, as I am, in its ability to do it again.

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