

Opinion

Serving the Lower Hudson Valley since 1850

The Journal News | Wednesday, February 11, 2009

7B
AIR NEWS

COMMUNITY VIEW

To the U.S. Senate, doesn't a half-million jobs mean anything?

Russell A. Davidson

More than 100 years ago, the architect Daniel Burnham said, "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized." While the federal stimulus package currently under consideration is certainly no little plan, the proposed changes by the Senate removed all of the elements that would even touch individual Americans, no less have any magic to stir men's blood.

I was one of more than 800 architects from around the country in Washington last week urging our local congressional leaders to place a high priority on investments in infrastructure as part of the economic stimulus bill. But, as we left the nation's capital, the Senate "compromise" eliminated \$19.5 billion in infrastructure spending for schools and cut another \$1.5 billion for energy-efficient federal buildings. And, with those cuts, the Senate tossed aside more than 500,000 jobs that might have benefited our local community and national economy.

As the global financial crisis continues to threaten the livelihood of American businesses and workers, the Senate's priority was to tell millions of American workers in the design and construction in-

Michael J. Fisch
President and
Publisher

Henry Freeman
Editor and Vice
President/News

Herb Pinder
Community Conversa-
tion and Editorial Page
Editor

Tracey Pinatotta
Interactivity Editor
914-694-5078

Laure Nikolski
Associate Editor
914-694-5024

914-694-5031

Debra West
Editorial Writer
914-694-5186

PN

Read more editorials, columns, letters and cartoons @ LoHud.com

On LoHud

Join the conversation about editorials, Community Views and Perspective articles; visit the "Opinion" forum at LoHud.com.

Industry that they don't deserve to be a part of the economic recovery. Nearly 1 million jobs have been lost in this vital sector of the economy — which accounts for 1 in 10 dollars of Gross Domestic Product — over the past two years. A study conducted by the Center for Regional Analysis at George Mason University states that each \$1 million in construction spending supports 28.5 full-time jobs. The Senate's compromise only slows the momentum of jobs creation.

As an architect active in this sector of the construction economy in the Lower Hudson Valley I see firsthand how many jobs school construction creates and sustains right here in our area. Every tier of the local design and construction industry including architects and engineers, construction contractors, union trades of all types, laborers and materials suppliers benefit from these projects. School build-

ings comprise the largest type of publicly funded building in this country, and they impact every neighborhood.

New York has the oldest average age of school buildings in the entire country, and every day I see buildings that are overcrowded and in poor condition in Yonkers, Clarkstown, Eastchester, White Plains, Brewster and Poughkeepsie to name a few. Even more important is the improvements to the lives of children that benefit from the rebuilt and renewed school buildings. After all, it is this generation of students that will eventually help pay for this stimulus package; shouldn't they directly benefit from its impact?

Has Congress lost its bearings? Generations of students are preparing for life in the global economy in FEMA-like trailers or classrooms with falling ceiling tiles. According to the National Education Association, it would take more than \$268 billion to repair and modernize America's 12 school facilities. In fact, the state Education Data Center of the Council of Chief State School Officers shows average spending by school districts on operations and maintenance is \$900 per student, or \$45 billion nationwide per year. This means it costs school districts \$45 billion just to maintain school buildings' current condition. Construction adds an addition-



Tania Savryna/The Journal News
Yonkers schools Superintendent Bernard Pierozzi, left, and John Carr, executive director of engineering, talk about the new air cooling system being put in at Saunders High School July 30, 2008.

al \$45 billion per year. In an economic crisis as grave as this, we need to do everything we can to stimulate the economy and rebuild our communities. What better way to do so than to invest in our children?

Similarly, most people assume that pollution from cars and factories are the leading cause of global warming — but the true sleeping giant is the built environment. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Energy calculate that buildings account

for nearly half (48 percent) of all greenhouse gas emissions — far more than transportation (27 percent) and industry (25 percent). Buildings also account for 76 percent of all electricity generated at power plants. The federal government alone has jurisdiction over a significant portion of all buildings in the U.S. requiring significant energy-reduction targets in new and renovated federal buildings will demonstrate to the private sector that the federal government is leading by example.

As the Senate and House bring their respective versions of the economic stimulus plan to conference, we are going to fight and urge Congress to ensure that any economic recovery plan it sends to President Obama includes significant investments in the building sector in order to create jobs, move our nation closer to energy independence and improve the quality of life in every American community.

The writer is president of Mount Kisco-based KG&D Architects, which is engaged in school and other building projects throughout the Lower Hudson Valley. He was 2007 president of the American Institute of Architects of New York State.