

# THE HILL



## Education and Infrastructure; Rebuilding America

By Kathy Kemper 03/26/12 5:45 PM ET

With the economy on a shaky road to recovery, it has become clear that the Great Recession triggered a fundamental change in the way Americans are forced to operate in the globalized economy. Everyone is feeling the strains. The archetype of the "company man" is fast going extinct, schools and other public services are facing record budget cuts, our infrastructure is antiquated and deteriorating every day, and access to global labor markets has created a flat line in wage increases for the poorest Americans.

But it's not all gloom and doom. America has long been the global destination for the planet's most daring and innovative minds, and globalization has only fueled our ability to tap into the global intellectual fountain. Think of the recent slump as growing pains. With the sheer amount of change in the last generation it is inevitable that there will need to be an adjustment period where we as a nation reinvent how we operate our economy and start to implement long-term solutions that will ensure a 21st century of unimaginable progress for all Americans.

A recent event in Washington, the Yale CEO Caucus, featured a panel of influential business leaders who believe passionately that infrastructure and big public spending projects are not only recommended, they are sorely needed. The participants were asked to rank the needed infrastructure programs in order of importance. First was the electric grid, where new innovations in smart grid technology that have already been adopted in nations like Italy need to be implemented here on a larger scale. Following the grid was highways and bridges, airports, mass transit and mobile broadband. Everyone agreed that every part of our infrastructure needs a significant capital infusion. The issue, they said, was Congress. Congress has become reactionary and only concerned with short-term solutions, like a doctor who treats symptoms while ignoring the actual disease. Even universally accepted programs like the R&D tax credit still have to be periodically renewed rather than permanently adopted into the tax code due to short-term political interests that ignore the actual needs of communities. Earmarks, now poisonous on the Hill, are the foundation of infrastructure spending in this country. And rather than have a constructive dialogue the conversation has been relegated to glorified mud flinging.

While it is very important to invest time and money into infrastructure, the foundations of our economy, and fixing the tone of the political debate in Washington, there is another crucial program that needs restructuring and reinvestment. Education. People are America's most valuable resource and if we want to get ahead in a competitive global economy we need to invest in our human capital.

On that critical topic I heard some remarkable advice from two great minds, Aneesh Chopra, former CTO of the United States and Vijay Vaitheeswaran of the Economist. They agreed, part of the problem was the lack of innovation in the way we educate. Big Pharma, for example, invests 15% of its annual revenues into R&D, with amazing results for global health. Public education on the other hand invests just 0.5% into R&D. This is an unfortunate failure that needs to be rectified. Already we've seen examples of how using innovative teaching techniques can blow traditional methods out of the water. One example is the Education Domination program from DARPA that developed a 4-month personalized course for a select group of future IT candidates. After completing the program the graduates outperformed professionals in their field who had 7 years of on the job experience.

Innovation and investment are what made this country great and they are the key to a sustainable recovery.

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