

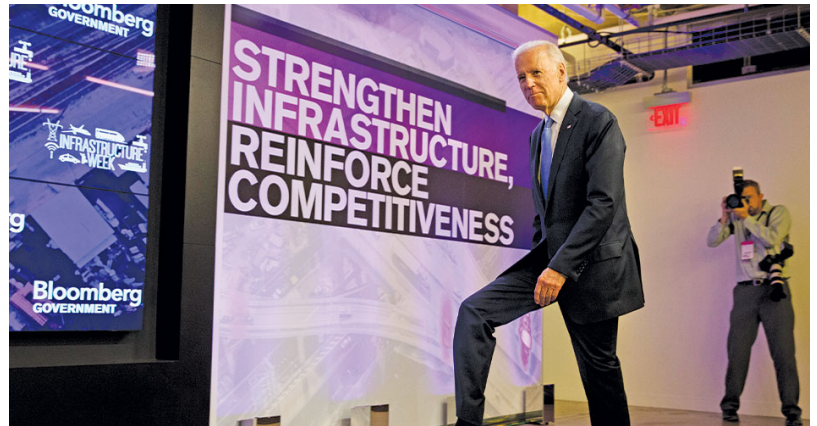


Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on April 23, 2021

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They Call It Infrastructure Spending

Back in the early '90s, the Clinton administration coined a new buzzword, “infrastructure,” that took Washington social circles by storm and soon became an all-purpose rationale for spending on what were once more honestly styled “boondoggles.” But whereas “boondoggle” long connoted wasteful spending on useless public works, “infrastructure” was a serious term, conjuring as it did visions of grandiose, visionary public spending. “Boondoggles” were tawdry and venal, the pet projects of corrupt, cigar-chomping politicians in smoke-filled rooms, but “infrastructure investment” is the enlightened stock-in-trade of the Ivy League-educated sophisticates who constitute America’s de facto ruling class.



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From the Clinton era onward, every liberal politician has been bound by the creed of “infrastructure investment.” The word itself is imprecise, as all buzzwords must be. To the Clintons, it referred to any publicly funded or subsidized network or conduit — transportation, communication, sanitary, etc. — that tied the country together. In Biden’s America, the term seems to have expanded to embrace anything that politicians want to spend money on — “health infrastructure” and “environmental infrastructure,” for example. And, true to form, the Biden administration has cobbled together an ambitious \$2 trillion dollar “infrastructure plan” signaling legislative and budgetary priorities for the next four years. The quaintly named “Build Back Better” plan is the lineal successor of federal government boondoggles stretching all the way back to the New Deal. The Biden plan even pays rhetorical homage to FDR’s mother of all boondoggles with its “Civilian Climate Corps” (an obvious nod to FDR’s Civilian Conservation Corps), while contemplating “investment” in a broad array of distinctly 21st-century Big Government conceits. Let’s have a look.

First of all, the overall cost of the Biden plan is somewhat in dispute, with estimates varying between \$2 trillion and \$2.5 trillion. The plan, supposedly, will be paid for by a hike in corporate taxes, to 28 percent, coupled with legislative measures preventing U.S. corporations from shielding their assets from taxes by offshoring. Such a measure is conveniently expected to generate \$2.5 trillion over the next 15 years, according to Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. But, of course, everyone knows that corporate tax hikes alone will not pay for the Biden plan (nor for the already-signed \$1.9 trillion COVID relief bill). More robust sources of revenue will be needed, and negotiations are already under way in Washington to figure out the best way of fleecing American taxpayers without alienating too much of the voter base.

One proposal, an old Washington standby, is simply to borrow the money. After all, claim the happy



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talkers, this infrastructure investment is so good that it will pay for itself in rising revenues begotten by an infrastructure-fueled economic boom. As one former Treasury official argued on CNBC, “You can make a very strong case to borrow the money and pay it back over time on expected returns. We have failed to invest in all of the infrastructure needs that this country has by this fictional argument that it must be paid for for us to do it.” Indeed, a study just carried out by the Wharton School of Business discovered that the Biden plan, thanks to the inherent virtue of infrastructure, will reduce the national debt by 6.4 percent — in 2050!

Assuming that at least part of the Biden plan will need to be paid for by the usual suite of tax hikes, what other options, in addition to corporate taxes, will be under discussion? Income taxes on the wealthy, another time-honored canard, are of course on the table. Biden even promised during the campaign a tax hike on Americans making over \$400,000 per year, and appears open to discussing it in connection with his infrastructure plan (whose passage, in the current Washington political climate, appears to be a foregone conclusion). Other possible sources of revenue under discussion include a gas-tax hike. Owing to the fact that the federal gas-tax has not been raised since 1993 and that the price of gasoline is well below historic highs, this might appear to be a politically viable option in the eyes of most Washington Democrats.

A couple of novel funding options are also under consideration, including a mileage tax (or vehicle miles tax, VMT). While it is not yet clear how a VMT would be levied, the idea behind it is simple enough: The farther you travel, the more tax you pay. In this way, people who try to minimize gas costs (and hence, the gas tax) by driving fuel-efficient cars will be taxed according to the amount they drive and not the amount of fuel they consume. Wrote Congressman Sam Graves (R-Mo.):

Although critics will say that we’re not ready for VMT, we’ve heard that same argument for too long. The Highway Trust Fund continues to lose more and more revenue because not all users are paying their fair share given increased fuel efficiency and electric vehicle technology.

The VMT is likely to become a reality sooner rather than later, since many Republicans, such as Graves, are clamoring for everyone to pay their “fair share.”

Yet another enticing source of revenue (to liberals, that is) is the electricity grid — part of the very infrastructure that the Biden plan proposes to overhaul. Here, the tempting options are almost endless, from federal levies on home electricity bills to taxes at charging stations for electric vehicles.

Whatever the legislative outcome, it appears that America is heading toward a wave of new taxes and tax hikes, made necessary by the Biden infrastructure project, on top of trillions of new debt courtesy of the government’s response to the coronavirus pandemic. But what sort of bang will America be getting for its “Build Back Better” buck? Biden’s program envisions the inevitable expenditures on highway and bridge repairs, long-overdue work repeatedly postponed because of overspending on other projects.

But the plan doesn’t stop there. In keeping with the relentless anti-progress dogma of the “Green” agenda, the Biden plan will funnel at least \$174 billion into electrification of school buses and the federal government car fleet — that is, it will plow billions into driving gasoline-powered transportation into obsolescence.

The recent drive to nullify more than two centuries of technological advance by making internal-combustion engines illegal is a product of the breathtaking ignorance and fanaticism of the Green lobby. Electric and hybrid vehicles have a place in urban environments, where commutes are typically



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short. But because most such vehicles — especially electric cars — have maximum ranges of less than 300 miles between charges, and because such vehicles typically take an hour or more to recharge, they are effectively useless in the wide open spaces of non-urban America. Electric cars and other vehicles make sense in densely populated areas such as China, Japan, and parts of Western Europe, but outside of the urban corridors of the east and west coasts, they will have little utility in much of the United States. Such concerns, of course, are no deterrent to the radical Left, which is determined to transform Americans' standard of living by rolling back as much technological progress as they can in the name of saving the planet.

Generating a lot of buzz is Biden's aforementioned Civilian Climate Corps, a \$10 billion government make-work program in the grand tradition of the New Deal that will use federal taxpayer dollars to create an army of workers ostensibly to protect the climate. This proposal has already prompted effusive praise from the usual lineup of liberal media outlets. Jim Lardner of *The New Yorker*, for example, called it a "Big-government plan that all Americans can embrace." While short on particulars so far, the general outline of the plan, described in a Biden executive order on climate, is "to conserve and restore public lands and waters, bolster community resilience, increase reforestation, increase carbon sequestration in the agricultural sector, protect biodiversity, improve access to recreation, and address the changing climate." The fact that this program is transparently modeled after the centerpiece of the FDR-era New Deal sends a clear message: The Civilian Climate Corps is an early installment of the Dems' infamous "Green New Deal," camouflaged as infrastructure investment.

Among other high-priced items in the Biden plan are:

- \$100 billion for high-speed broadband;
- \$16 billion to put people to work plugging oil and gas wells;
- \$213 billion for affordable housing;
- \$100 billion for school construction;
- \$25 billion for child-care facilities;
- \$400 billion for care for the elderly and the disabled;
- \$180 billion for research and development, including \$35 billion earmarked for climate-related research (again, think "Green New Deal by installment");
- \$300 billion for business and manufacturing; and
- \$100 billion for workforce development programs.

Aside from the staggering price tags, all of these programs have something else in common: Not one of them is remotely legitimate under the Constitution and its limited writ of federal authority. Yet Americans, browbeaten and exhausted by years of leftist fury over the Trump phenomenon, as well as more than a year of pandemic hysteria-mongering, are about to have yet another illegitimate yoke placed on their shoulders by a newly energized Left determined to impose as much of its agenda as possible while political conditions are favorable. If the Biden plan becomes law, in whole or in part, Americans will be poorer and less free. It is very clear that Biden and his supporters intend a radical remake of America, using the pandemic as cover, just as FDR once did during the Great Depression. The remedy, as always, is an informed citizenry holding the feet of elected representatives to the fire.



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Without doing so, it is horrifying to imagine how much damage the radical Left will be able to inflict between now and the next election, when the radicals need to be replaced with the constitutionally minded.



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