

Speech by Bryan Kennedy Mayor of the City of Glendale Wisconsin
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Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today about an issue that I believe should be a much bigger part of the Democratic conversation about poverty, economic opportunity, and working families: the National Infrastructure Bank Act, H.R. 5356.

I want to make the case that this is not simply an infrastructure bill. It is a jobs bill. It is an economic development bill. It is a labor bill. And it is, fundamentally, an anti-poverty bill.

I come to this issue from the perspective of a local elected official. I am the mayor of Glendale, Wisconsin. I am also the national president of Democratic Municipal Officials--an organization representing tens of thousands of local elected officials around the country. I serve on the board of a regional sewerage district that serves 29 communities. And I spent many years as a college professor who studied economic development abroad.

So I have seen this issue from several different perspectives. But perhaps the most important perspective is the one I have as a mayor: I see every day how difficult it has become for communities to build and maintain the infrastructure our residents depend upon.

Cities, villages, towns and school districts have enormous infrastructure needs. We need to replace roads and bridges. We need to upgrade water and sewer systems. We need stormwater infrastructure. We need schools, sidewalks, public buildings and other capital improvements.

The problem is that we often don't have the resources to pay for those investments.

State support for local governments has declined or failed to keep pace with inflation in many parts of the country. At the same time, construction costs have risen dramatically. So local governments increasingly have only one option: borrow the money.

And borrowing money is expensive.

My own community is financially strong. We have a fund balance of approximately 43 percent, and we have AA+ and Aa1 bond ratings from S&P and Moody's. We are about as fiscally responsible as a local government can be.

Yet when we went to the bond market in 2025, we paid approximately 4 percent interest.

Now imagine what that means for a smaller community with a weaker tax base or a lower bond rating.

And imagine what happens when communities decide they simply cannot afford to borrow at those rates at all. Projects get delayed. Roads deteriorate. Infrastructure gets more expensive. Economic development gets postponed. And the people who suffer most are often the people who can least afford to live with failing public infrastructure.

That is where H.R. 5356 comes in.

The National Infrastructure Bank would create a financing mechanism that allows municipalities and school districts to borrow money for infrastructure projects at dramatically lower interest rates.

And there is something particularly important about this model: the money doesn't simply disappear after it is spent.

When communities repay their loans, that money goes back into the fund and can be lent again to another community somewhere else in America.

It creates a revolving source of capital for infrastructure.

We already know this model works.

The federal government has successful revolving loan funds for water infrastructure. States have similar programs. In Wisconsin, our Environmental Improvement Fund helps communities finance water, wastewater and stormwater projects.

These programs allow communities to borrow at favorable rates for infrastructure that is absolutely essential.

But there is a huge gap in the system.

We have financing mechanisms for water and wastewater, but we don't have a comparable national financing mechanism for the roads, bridges, sidewalks, streetlights, schools, public buildings and other infrastructure that communities need to build and maintain.

The National Infrastructure Bank can help fill that gap.

But there is another reason I think the Poverty Council should be paying close attention to this legislation.

Jobs.

When we talk about fighting poverty, we have to talk about creating jobs that allow people to escape poverty.

We don't just need more jobs. We need good jobs.

H.R. 5356 provides an opportunity to invest hundreds of billions of dollars in infrastructure while creating millions of good-paying jobs for American workers.

And importantly, this legislation doesn't simply say, "Let's build things and hope the jobs are good."

It establishes high labor standards.

Projects financed through the bank are subject to Davis-Bacon prevailing wage requirements and Project Labor Agreement requirements.

That means the people building America's infrastructure are not treated as disposable labor.

They earn family-sustaining wages. They have access to strong labor standards. They have the opportunity to build careers and support their families.

And that matters enormously to the work of this Council.

Because if we want to address poverty, we have to create pathways into the middle class.

A young person should be able to graduate from high school, enter an apprenticeship, learn a skilled trade, join a union, build infrastructure in their community and earn enough money to buy a home and raise a family.

That is an anti-poverty program.

And when we invest in infrastructure, we create another economic multiplier. The workers who earn those wages spend that money in their communities. They buy groceries. They pay rent or mortgages. They buy cars. They eat at local restaurants. Their families participate in the local economy.

So infrastructure investment doesn't just create construction jobs. It creates economic activity throughout the communities where those workers live.

This is also an opportunity for Democrats to talk about something we don't always talk about enough: how we actually build an economy that works for working people.

We should be talking about the dignity of work.

We should be talking about rebuilding the middle class.

We should be talking about the fact that government can make investments that create opportunities rather than simply talking about the problems facing working families.

And we should be talking about the role that unions play in making sure economic growth actually reaches working people.

The National Infrastructure Bank gives us a very concrete example of what that looks like.

Now, I want to make a very specific request of everyone in this room.

Please find out whether your member of Congress is a co-sponsor of H.R. 5356.

If they are, thank them. Praise their leadership. Encourage them to lead on the issue and make it a talking point.

If they are not, I am asking you to contact them and ask them to become a co-sponsor.

Don't wait until next year.

Don't wait until we have a new Congress.

We are building momentum for this legislation right now.

Every additional co-sponsor demonstrates that there is growing support for this approach. Every conversation with a member of Congress helps establish that infrastructure investment, good union jobs, and affordable municipal financing are Democratic Party priorities.

And we need to be thinking beyond the current Congress.

We are working toward a Democratic House majority. When Democrats retake the House, we want H.R. 5356 to be positioned as a priority from the beginning.

We want it to move through committee.

We want it to come to the floor.

And we want Democrats to be able to say that we are going to invest in the infrastructure of this country while creating millions of family-sustaining union jobs.

That is a powerful message.

But we have to start building the support now.

The members of Congress who will eventually determine whether this legislation moves need to hear from us today. They need to know that local elected officials support it. They need to know that labor supports it. They need to know that advocates for working families support it.

And they need to hear that Democrats have a vision for rebuilding America that goes beyond simply repairing what is broken.

We can build an economy where infrastructure investment creates opportunity.

We can put people to work rebuilding their communities.

We can give municipalities and school districts access to affordable capital.

We can reduce the amount of taxpayer money that goes toward interest and put more of that money into actual construction.

We can insist on prevailing wages and strong labor standards.

And we can create a revolving source of capital that keeps working for communities over and over again.

That is why I believe H.R. 5356 is so important.

This isn't just about infrastructure.

It is about who gets to participate in America's economic future.

And if we are serious about reducing poverty, strengthening the middle class and creating an economy that works for working people, I believe the National Infrastructure Bank should be part of that conversation.

So please: check the co-sponsor list. If your representative is already there, thank them. If they aren't, call them, email them, request a meeting, and ask them to become a co-sponsor of H.R. 5356.

Let's build the congressional support now so that when Democrats have the opportunity to govern again, we are ready to make the National Infrastructure Bank a priority.

Thank you.