

Chuck Schumer: Mr. President, Let's make a deal

Now that Democrats soon will control one branch of Congress, President Donald Trump again is signaling that infrastructure could be an area of compromise. We agree, but if the president wanted to earn Democratic support in the Senate, any infrastructure bill would have to include policies and funding that help transition our country to a clean-energy economy and mitigate the risks the United States already faces from climate change.

For too long, Congress has failed to act in a meaningful way to combat the threat posed by climate change. Powerful special interests have a stranglehold on many of my Republican colleagues; some GOP legislators even refuse to acknowledge that climate change is happening. So despite the immense size of the problem, despite wildfires that sweep through the West and hurricanes that grow more powerful over the years, real action on climate change has been stymied by the denialism of the president and too many Republicans in Congress. While notable progress was made during the Obama administration to stimulate renewable-energy technology and fashion international agreements to reduce carbon emissions, the Trump administration has shamefully undone much of that progress and appears unwilling to take any new steps to combat climate change. Worst of all, the administration is pulling the United States out of the Paris climate accord, giving a green light to countries such as China and India to increase carbon emissions by unacceptable amounts.

In the 116th Congress, however, Democrats will have an extraordinary opportunity to force action on climate change. Not only will House Democrats have the power to propose, debate and pass progressive legislation on the subject, but

Senate Democrats will have substantial leverage as well. For any legislation to pass the Senate, 60 votes are required.

One area where there's an opportunity to do something on climate change is an infrastructure bill, since Trump repeatedly has named infrastructure as a potential area of compromise in the new Congress. Truthfully, infrastructure investment has been a priority for Democrats for decades. That's why Democrats last year proposed a trillion-dollar infrastructure bill, which the president ignored. Our plan suggested bold new investments in clean energy and climate resiliency, one step on our path to a 100 percent clean-energy economy. And we could finance the bill entirely by reversing the worst giveaways in the Trump tax bill, those gifted to multinational corporations and the wealthiest of the wealthiest.

That's why I sent a letter to President Trump on Friday that describes the kinds of policies Democrats expect in an infrastructure bill. For example, we should make massive investments in renewable-energy infrastructure, especially in exciting new technologies such as battery storage. We also must make our infrastructure more climate-resilient, particularly the electrical grid and our water and wastewater systems. Those items belong in any infrastructure bill – indeed they were all included in the Senate Democratic proposal last year – but we can and should go further.

We should provide permanent tax credits for clean-energy production and storage, electric vehicles and energy-efficient homes. We should invest in conservation, wildlife and deferred maintenance on our public lands, because this can both mitigate the impacts of climate change and grow the outdoor economy. We should significantly reduce the release of methane pollution from domestic energy production. And we have to reduce the amount of carbon we release into the atmosphere. All of these policies can and will create good-paying green jobs.

No doubt, a single infrastructure bill alone will not solve our climate problem. But it is an important and necessary first step to include at least some, if not many, of these ideas. Without them, Trump should not count on Democratic support in the Senate.

It's impossible to overstate the urgency with which America needs to confront climate change. Even the Trump administration, which officially denies humankind's role in climate change, released a report last month outlining its current impacts and warning of dire consequences in the near future. Without drastic intervention, more powerful storms, floods and fires, as well as billions of dollars in damage to our economy, await the next generation of Americans.

Two weeks ago, I was blessed with the birth of my first grandchild. I want him to grow up and grow old in a world that's safe and healthy – a dream I know every American has for their children and grandchildren. In the next Congress, Democrats have to force the issue. An infrastructure bill in the new Congress could be one of the first opportunities we get. We intend to take it.

Chuck Schumer, a Democrat from New York, is Senate minority leader.

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