**Who is in Charge of $1.7 Trillion in New Public Spending?**

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The US is about to spend a colossal amount of money, some $1.7 trillion, on Infrastructure and Jobs; Chips and Science; and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

Taken together, this is the largest spending approved by Congress probably since FDR’s New Deal on what can be called US infrastructure broadly defined. In theory, these three laws, if properly and effectively implemented, should make the US competitive and prosperous for the 21st century.

But will that happen? Is the Biden administration prepared and able to ensure that the American public will get its money’s worth? What and where are the plans and strategies to execute and oversee these laws? And is Congress productively engaged?

The White House press release states the Infrastructure and Jobs law “will rebuild America’s roads, ports, airports, bridges and rails, expand access to clean drinking water, ensure every American has access to high-speed internet, tackle the climate crisis, advance environmental justice, and invest in communities that have too often been left behind.” About $1.2 trillion was appropriated for this purpose

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The $100 billion “Chips and Science Act will strengthen American manufacturing, supply chains, and national security, and invest in research and development, science and technology, and the workforce of the future to keep the United States the leader in the industries of tomorrow, including nanotechnology, clean energy, quantum computing, and artificial intelligence….and will boost American semiconductor research, development, and production, ensuring U.S. leadership in the technology that forms the foundation of everything from automobiles to household appliances to defence systems.”

Last, the $370 billion “IRA will lower costs for families, combat the climate crisis, reduce the deficit, and finally ask the largest corporations to pay their fair share” by:

. Cutting Prescription Drug Costs;

. Lowering Health Care Costs;

. Defeating Special Interests;

. Lowering Energy Costs;

. Building a Clean Energy Economy;

. Reducing Harmful Pollution;

. Making the Tax Code Fairer, and

. Reducing the Deficit.

The aims of these spending programs are ambitious to the extreme. While administration critics dismiss the significance and impact of these acts, reading all three reveals the potential of this legislation if, and only if, each is successfully implemented. However, in this case, can a broken government work?

For decades, the plight of America’s infrastructure has long been recognised. Over 40 years ago, a leading Washington think tank released a study that warned America’s electrical power grid was antiquated and required immediate remedial action. That vulnerability has only increased, certainly in the cyber age and when far more electrical power will be required for the many hundreds of millions of electric vehicles that are expected to be on the road in the coming decades.

Last week, this column argued that the nation desperately needed a chief operating officer (COO). Obviously, the Secretaries of Commerce, Energy, Treasury and Transportation have key roles in making this work. But who is responsible for the integration and coordination in and among these departments? The public and Congress need to know. A COO would have answered this question.

The 118th Congress forms in January with a Democratically controlled Senate and a Republican House majority. But can both bodies work together to oversee this spending when partisan politics threatens gridlock? The White House must answer these questions as well as assure the public that someone competent is in charge of these programs.

In each department, it appears that non-confirmed appointees will lead in implementation. One assumes cabinet secretaries will convene an oversight or coordinating body. Will this happen? And will the public receive ongoing reports and updates on progress in implementing these programs? Thus far, none are in place.

Asked at a press conference earlier this month about what changes he would make over the next two years, President Joe Biden said “none.” He is correct in that it will take time to implement these three laws. The state of implementation will determine success or failure. However, the president would be wise to heed one suggestion.

Biden needs to make public the administration’s strategy and plan of action for implementing and overseeing this legislation passed by Congress and that he signed into law. That plan must include a comprehensive list of projects and benefits; completion dates; and personnel responsible for implementation. Without bipartisanship and a measure of goodwill, there is no guarantee that this money will be used in the nation’s best interest and could well be wasted. But is anyone listening on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue?

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