



Interview With
President-Elect

Barack Obama

In this exclusive interview with ACEC just prior to the historic election, Mr. Obama offered candid views on specific issues of importance to the engineering industry.

ACEC: ACEC members are involved in virtually every aspect of infrastructure development and improvement, from transportation, water projects and environmental restoration to energy development and transmission. America has seriously underinvested in its infrastructure over many years. What steps will you take as president to reverse this trend and promote the kind of infrastructure needed to sustain a growing economy?

PRESIDENT-ELECT BARACK OBAMA: Modernizing America's infrastructure is a critical component of my long-term economic growth agenda, and it also plays a key role in ending our dependence on foreign oil and reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. While China, India and our other economic competitors are making significant investments to build 21st-century roads, bridges and ports, Washington not only has provided too few resources to maintain our

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President-elect Obama confers with his designated White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel.

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existing infrastructure but also has paid little attention to building new infrastructure to accommodate a growing population and the demands of a global economy. We need a new national focus on infrastructure policy to strengthen our competitiveness, improve the safety of our infrastructure and combat global climate change.

The safety and capacity deficiencies of our various infrastructure modes are well documented. Ultimately, what Joe Biden and I find to be the biggest deficit in our national infrastructure is a coordinated and sustained federal, state and local effort to safeguard and modernize all of our infrastructure modes. As president, I will enter into a new partnership with state and local civic, political and business leaders to enact a truly national infrastructure policy that recognizes that we must upgrade our infrastructure to meet the demands of a growing population, a changing economy and our short- and long-term energy challenges.

During the campaign, I proposed several initiatives to help address our infrastructure challenges. As part of our emergency economic plan, we have called for the cre-

ation of a \$25 billion Jobs and Growth Fund, which will partially be used to replenish the Highway Trust Fund so that our important infrastructure projects continue to receive adequate funding. We have called for reforming the federal transportation funding process, working to eliminate wasteful and politically motivated spending, and engaging state and local leaders in efforts to reevaluate our federal transportation funding process. As president, I will require governors and local leaders in metropolitan areas to make energy conservation a required part of their planning for the expenditure of federal transportation funds—an effort that will spur more focus on investing in efficient modes of transportation and efficient projects.

Finally, I also have called for the creation of a new, independent, expert-run National Infrastructure Reinvestment Bank to invest \$60 billion in additional direct federal funding over 10 years into our transportation infrastructure. This Bank will use this \$60 billion to leverage private and public capital to spur even more investments beyond today's funding into our infrastructure.

ACEC: What is your plan to address the unstable cost of gasoline and other energy challenges facing the country?

OBAMA: America's challenges in providing secure, affordable energy while addressing climate change mean that we must make much more efficient use of energy and begin to rely on new energy sources that eliminate or greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. My programs will focus on a greatly expanded program of federally funded energy research and development and on policies designed to speed the adoption of innovative energy technologies and stimulate private innovation.

First, I have proposed programs that, taken together, will increase federal investment in the clean energy research, development and deployment to \$150 billion over 10 years. This research will cover:

- Basic research to develop alternative fuels and chemicals;
- Equipment and designs that can greatly reduce energy use in residential and commercial buildings—both new and existing;

- New vehicle technologies capable of significantly reducing our oil consumption;
- Advanced energy storage and transmission that would greatly help the economics of new electric-generating technologies and plug-in hybrids;
- Technologies for capturing and sequestering greenhouse gases produced by coal plants; and
- A new generation of nuclear electric technologies that address cost, safety, waste disposal and proliferation risks.

I also will work closely with utilities to introduce a digital smart grid that can optimize the overall efficiency of the nation's electric utility system, by managing demand and making effective use of renewable energy and energy storage.

Second, it is essential that we create a strong, predictable market for energy innovations with concrete goals that speed introduction of innovative products and provide a strong incentive for private R&D investment in energy technologies. These concrete goals include:

- Increasing fuel economy standards 4 percent per year and providing loan guarantees for domestic auto plants and parts manufacturers to build new fuel-efficient cars domestically;
- Increasing new building efficiency by 50 percent and existing building efficiency by 25 percent over the next decade, and taking other steps that will reduce the energy intensity of our economy 50 percent by 2030;
- Extending the Production Tax Credit for five years and creating a federal Renewable Portfolio Standard that will require that 10 percent of American electricity be derived from renewable sources by 2012, and 25 percent by 2025; and
- Ensuring that regulations and incentives in all federal agencies support the national energy and environmental goals in ways that encourage innovation and ingenuity.

I also will encourage communities around the nation to design and build sustainable communities that cut energy use with walkable community designs and expanded investment in mass transit.

ACEC: Like most businesses, the rising cost of health insurance continues to be a major issue of concern to the engineering industry. What is your strategy for controlling health care costs?

OBAMA: I am committed to signing health legislation by the end of my first term in office that ensures all Americans have affordable, accessible health care coverage. My plan will save a typical American family up to \$2,500 every year on medical expenditures.

Our plan maintains patient choice and establishes a National Health Insurance Exchange with a range of private insurance options, as well as a new public health plan to allow individuals and small businesses to buy affordable and accessible health coverage similar to that available to federal employees. The plan will provide tax credits to people so they can afford health care and will reduce the typical family's health care costs by \$2,500 per year by modernizing our inefficient health care delivery system. Inefficient and poor quality care costs the nation \$50 billion to \$100 billion every year. Billions more are wasted on administration and overhead because of inefficiencies in the health care system.

I believe we must dramatically redesign our health system to reduce inefficiency and waste and improve health care quality, which will drive down costs for families and individuals. We can improve efficiencies and lower costs in the health care system by:

- Offering federal reinsurance to employers to help ensure that unexpected or catastrophic illnesses do not make health insurance unaffordable or out of reach for businesses and their employees;

- Ensuring that patients receive and providers deliver the best possible care;
- Adopting state-of-the-art health information technology systems;
- Reforming our market structure to increase competition in the insurance industry; and
- Reducing prescription drug costs by allowing the government to negotiate for cheaper Medicare Part D drugs and allowing the importation of safe, less expensive drugs from developed nations such as Canada.

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ACEC: Do you see future changes in the tax code as necessary to promote economic growth and, if so, what policies will you promote as president?

OBAMA: After working-age households have seen real income declines of \$2,000—and during a time in which typical families are seeing the costs of health insurance, gas prices and college tuition spiral each and every year—there is an urgent need for middle-income tax relief to help families maintain economic security as well as invest in their futures. I will offer 95 percent of working Americans and their families a tax cut of up to \$1,000 each and every year. I also will offer new tax credits for families' retirement savings, college expenses and mortgage interest payments, to help Americans build nest eggs and move up the economic ladder.

Meanwhile, I have laid out a pragmatic, sensible approach to deliver middle-class tax relief in a fiscally responsible way. I will raise revenue for the federal government at the same time as cutting taxes for middle-income families by closing inefficient tax loopholes, cracking down on offshore tax

havens and repealing a portion of the tax cuts passed in the last eight years for families making more than \$250,000.

Finally, my plan cuts taxes on the net for the economy while maintaining fiscal discipline by cutting spending overall, including by responsibly ending the war in Iraq, limiting payments to high-income farmers, cutting subsidies for private plans in Medicare, reforming student loans, cutting earmarks, ending no-bid contracting and phasing out unnecessary and duplicative programs. Overall, my budget will reduce the deficit relative to its current level and its realistic future trajectory.

ACEC: We have a shortage of engineers in this country, with the National Science Foundation and others reporting that America's colleges and universities are not graduating enough students with degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics to compete in the global marketplace. What role can the federal government play in addressing this challenge?

OBAMA: In a globalized and technology-driven world, our prosperity and national security depend on our ability to lead the world in scientific and technological innovation. Other nations are now challenging that leadership, and in responding we must call upon the talent and creativity of the American people.

I will make an unprecedented commitment to science and America's future by making science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education a priority. I already have demonstrated this commitment by introducing legislation to support a strong STEM workforce and STEM literacy for all Americans. With Congressman and physicist Rush Holt, I helped establish a STEM Scholarship Base to prepare more students for STEM careers, creating a web portal with

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the financial aid opportunities available in science and technology. This will help first-generation college students who may otherwise receive limited guidance in how to finance a degree in science or technology after high school.

I also sponsored an amendment, which became law, to the America COMPETES Act that established a competitive state grant program to support summer learning opportunities with curricula that emphasize mathematics and problem solving. We cannot strengthen STEM education without addressing the broader challenges of improving American education and other priority issues.

My comprehensive education plan is built on the recognition that teachers play a critical role in student learning and achievement. My administration will work closely

with states and local communities to ensure that we recruit math and science graduates to the teaching profession. Through Teacher Service Scholarships, a Teacher Residency Program and Career Ladders, I will transform the teaching profession from one that has too many underpaid and insufficiently qualified teachers to one that attracts the best STEM teaching talent for our schools.

In addition to a focus on high-quality teachers, my comprehensive plan addresses the needs of our most at-risk children, focuses on strong school leaders and enlists parent and community support. My proposals for a comprehensive "zero to five" program will ensure that children enter school ready to learn. And when they finish school, I will make sure that through the new \$4,000 American Opportunity Tax Credit, they will have access to affordable higher education that will provide them with the science fluency they need to be leaders in STEM fields and across broad sectors of our society. ■



President-elect Obama vows to strengthen STEM education.

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