

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 17, 2008

The Honorable Barack Obama
The Office of the President-elect
Washington, DC 20270

Dear President-elect Obama:

With our country mired in a recession and turmoil roiling Main Street and Wall Street alike, it is clear that an economic stimulus proposal is desperately needed to create jobs, restore confidence in our economy, and rebuild our nation's aging infrastructure.

I appreciate your recent comments on the benefits of immediate aid to states and the need for long overdue infrastructure investments. For the past eight years, all Americans have felt the burden of stagnant wages, outsourced jobs, and increasing energy and education costs. As you know from campaigning across the length and breadth of the country, few states have felt this pain as acutely as my home state of Ohio.

From 2000-2005, seven Great Lakes states accounted for more than one-third of all lost domestic manufacturing jobs. Over this time period in Ohio, more than 200,000 hardworking men and women lost their manufacturing jobs. And over the past five years, Ohio has consistently had an unemployment rate above the national average. Add in the high home foreclosure rate, dramatic increase in bankruptcy filings, automotive industry woes, and the recent loss of nearly 10,000 jobs with the closure of a DHL facility in Wilmington, Ohio, and you can see the blows to Ohio's middle class have been severe.

As you work with Congress to craft an economic stimulus package, I urge you to acknowledge the disproportionate impact of the economic downturn on states like Ohio by taking factors like higher than average unemployment and foreclosure rates into account as you allocate stimulus funding. The effects of the economic crisis have been uneven, and to be effective, our nation's economic stimulus strategy should reflect that reality. In the same context, some communities across our nation, including that of Wilmington, Ohio, have endured the equivalent of a natural disaster – except theirs was an economic catastrophe. To ensure that areas like Wilmington can survive and thrive economically, they will need special attention in the stimulus package.

Like most states across the country, the opportunities for infrastructure investment in Ohio are many. Ohio's decaying water and sewer lines demand immediate investment. In addition, small towns and rural communities are struggling to make needed improvements in water infrastructure, including addressing combined sewage overflows.

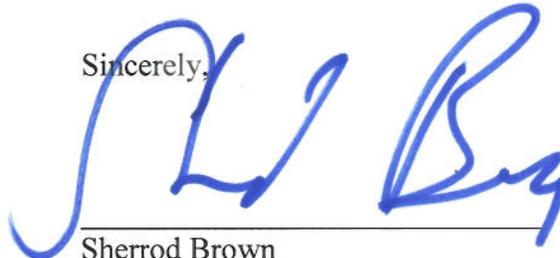
School construction is another priority that serves the dual purpose of creating immediate jobs and laying the groundwork for long-term economic growth. Expanding broadband in underserved regions will address counterproductive disparities in economic opportunity. Repairing aging bridges will help avoid a catastrophic collapse. New public and mass transit lines will reduce our carbon emissions and reliance on foreign oil. Investing in weatherization and other energy efficiency measures is a common sense means of creating construction jobs while reducing energy costs. And making crucial investments in alternative and renewable energy will boost an industry that not only holds tremendous economic potential for the country, but is fundamental to our nation's energy independence.

While we must make these investments in infrastructure, it is also crucial that we strengthen safety-net programs in this time of economic uncertainty and ensure that state and local governments are able to continue providing essential services. Programs that provide an immediate boost to the economy and help the working Americans affected most by this recession must be a priority—this includes an expansion and extension of unemployment insurance, increased funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).

State fiscal relief is needed not only to prevent further job loss, but to protect basic services that we too often take for granted – our firefighters, our police force, our public health departments, our school systems, the safety of our roads and bridges, and other programs too numerous to list. It is in our nation's interest to ensure that states can maintain these basic services, and that they can sustain Medicaid, a federal-state health and long-term care partnership that covers 1 in 5 children and 1 in 3 nursing home residents in Ohio.

As you have said, the challenges ahead are great and sacrifices must be made as we confront this historic moment. But by investing wisely to rebuild the nation's infrastructure and compassionately to prevent human suffering, we can overcome the economic challenges facing our nation and lay the foundation for enhanced global competitiveness and energy independence. You have said that Americans always rise to the moment, no matter how difficult or steep the climb may seem. I know that is true of my fellow Ohioans, and I look forward to working with you to restore prosperity for all Americans in the months and years ahead.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
U.S. Senator