

Community Comment
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Sam Pennisi

On Capital Improvement

America is the land of opportunity. That didn't happen by accident. From our founders until recently, we recognized the bounty of this land and made good use of it. We started as individuals mostly worked the land and farmed. We fed ourselves and made a business of sharing the wealth. As cities grew, we saw the value in the commons. Like in Arcata even, the Plaza was, and still is, a common. Today we use it for recreation, events, and open space. But old photos tell us of uses including livestock collection and sales of goods.

And then we began to build. First it was crude roads linking villages to towns to cities. This fostered commerce. We built railroads that moved goods and services like never before. We finished the transcontinental railroad after the civil war. We think of this as a private venture but government was a necessary partner in this critical venture. This opened the country to more people that could then pursue their dreams and utilize their talents to better themselves.

After the worst modern depression in our history, the government, our people's government, built our way out of it. As a people, we didn't just make jobs to help the unemployed, We built things. We built roads and bridges. We built buildings. We expanded railroads and communication systems. My dad was part of this in the Civilian Conservation Corps. He worked in a logging camp in Southern Oregon that supplied lumber for building that was shipped by rail wherever it was needed. This was a life changing experience for him. He was raised in Omaha, Nebraska and knew nothing of the land beyond Omaha.

During both Wars, especially World War Two, we built like never before. And we partnered like never before. Government, private business, and private citizens worked together to win a world conflict. Then we partnered with the world to build war torn countries back to where they could build lives and communities.

After the War, we built again. This time it was modern buildings, water and sewer systems, bridges and roads. President Eisenhower saw the value of better roads like some in Germany and advanced the building of the Interstate Highway System. This has become the circulation system of our country. We built airports to encourage the private airline companies and improved communication networks even into rural areas.

Through most of this time we seemed to realize that with building came the responsibility of maintenance. Budgets were adopted with capital building and maintenance funds built in. But over the last forty years or so, we have began to ignore the need to maintain and

replace and build new as needed for a growing and changing society. As a nation, our roads and bridges and railroads and runways are in dismal condition.

Why has this happened? Because we don't seem to acknowledge the fact that it takes money to keep things up. We simply have not taxed ourselves enough to support the common things we need and we have not used what we do have in the most effective way.

We need representatives in state houses and at the federal level that see the value in building for the common good. We are becoming a second class, first world nation.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.