

# U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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Dear Fellow Marylander:

The good news: positivity rates for COVID-19, at least in Maryland, are dropping, along with hospitalizations and deaths. Vaccination rates are up and, despite the ongoing frustration people are experiencing getting an appointment, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that more than 1.81 million doses of vaccine have been delivered to Maryland.

Also good news: The American Rescue Plan has passed the House of Representatives and will be considered in the Senate next week. The new, major package will bring needed relief directly to Americans, to our states, as well as cities and towns of all sizes. Assistance includes additional rounds of direct payments, funding to help struggling renters and homeowners, more funding for local school systems to safely reopen, crucial support for the hardest-hit small businesses to keep their doors open and navigate COVID-relief programs, expansion of mental health services, and funding to increase the speed of vaccine distribution and COVID-19 testing. With nearly 20 million men and women still out of work, it is no wonder that as many as 7 in 10 people support this relief package.

These two pieces of good news are directly related. We have an economic crisis in America that will not end until our public health crisis ends.

The pandemic is not over, but now that we have a functioning federal strategy in place to tackle COVID-19, we are in a stronger position to outline how and where we can make the investments in our economy so that it provides the strong foundation to build America back better than before.

Robust federal investment in infrastructure across a range of categories, from railroads and bridges to water, schools, and broadband creates jobs, expands opportunity, and lays a foundation for future economic growth. We need to improve our roads but also think far beyond them. This has been a priority for me, as well as the Transportation Alternatives Program – bikes, pedestrians and other

non-car options – that improves transportation infrastructure for local communities in ways that fit their specific needs.

I have been working on a wide range of infrastructure programs and projects since I arrived in the Senate. This Congress will be a bit different as I take over as chair of the Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee, which is part of the Committee on Environment and Public Works. This means I will have a direct role in developing the programs that will help rebuild and strengthen the backbone of American communities.

In this new role, I was proud to join a bipartisan group of senators in the Oval Office a few weeks ago to meet with President Joe Biden on this very topic. His charge to us was to work together. Stay bipartisan in our efforts and go big. We are digging this country out of a historic hole in responding to the devastating impacts of COVID-19 over the past year. Families and communities in Maryland and across the country have been on the edge and they need a lifeline. In responding to the immediate challenge of recovery, we also are looking to make investments in infrastructure that will shape our future for decades to come. This is not a time for timidity.

The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee has a strong track record of bipartisanship and we all tend to agree that we are long overdue for a major federal commitment to our infrastructure. I agree with President Biden that we must come together this year to act boldly on transportation and infrastructure—not only to reauthorize our critical programs, but to break new ground with smarter investments.

As we rebuild America from the ground up, we need to recognize that the way we've done things in the past may not be suited to our new realities—the need to address our climate crisis and the need to expand opportunity and address racial inequity and social disparities.

The winter storm that wreaked havoc in Texas and other states reminds us of how infrastructure and climate change are intertwined. We need to acknowledge the reality of climate change and build our infrastructure to be more resilient to its impacts and more protective of our environment.

For communities of color, infrastructure policy has for too long meant only the destructive and harmful impact of development, rather than the benefits and opportunities that infrastructure projects should bring.

The challenges of climate change, equity, and safety can be positive drivers of economic opportunity that can help us improve the strength and competitiveness of our economy and improve the health and wellbeing of our communities. While these challenges require bold investment, the cost of inaction is far greater.

This week, John Porcari, a former Maryland Secretary of Transportation, called this is a “generational opportunity” to invest in our infrastructure and pay it forward to future generations. You can see more of my Facebook/YouTube conversation with John and Eulois Cleckley, Executive Director, Denver Department of Transportation and Infrastructure [at this link](#). The key outcome of this conversation is that investing in a broad range of infrastructure will make America more competitive, safer, smarter and more equitable for our communities, our environment, and our future.

We need to be bold. We need to get this right.

Thank you and stay safe.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a prominent "B" and a trailing "en".

Ben Cardin