

# Congressmen Look To 'Big Vision' Projects

Nov. 27—An hour-long floor dialogue took place today at the House of Representatives among four Democratic Congressmen, who raised examples of “big projects” in American history, and how such a vision is needed today. Led by Rep. John Garamendi (Calif.), participants included Rep. Marcy Kaptur (Ohio) and New Yorkers Brian Higgins and Paul Tonko.

Noteworthy among the many examples they cited are the George Washington/Alexander Hamilton programs for canals, ports, and roads; New York Gov. DeWitt Clinton’s Erie Canal; and President Dwight Eisenhower’s St. Lawrence Seaway project.

Although three of the lawmakers are sponsors of H.R. 1489 to reinstate the Glass-Steagall law, they did not touch on the need for that action as the gateway for a new credit system. Instead, there was back and forth on the idea of borrowing the funds required, at 1% interest. Representative Higgins raised the New America Foundation proposal for, as he said, “a \$1.2 trillion investment in rebuilding the roads and bridges of America. That plan . . . would create 27 million jobs. . . .”

Representative Garamendi opened by saying that their intention was “to talk about the economy and to talk specifically about jobs, and the things we can do here, in the waning days of the Congress to create some job opportunities.” He dismissed the idea of sticking to the talking points of the “fiscal cliff,” or the “austerity bomb,” or the “debt limit.”

Here are excerpts from the discussion, ordered by theme:

**Sacramento River Management (Calif.).** Garamendi called this “the second most risky region in the nation for flooding and flood damage.” He said: “Should a levee break in that region—and those levees are not up to 200-year standards—people would have less than 20 minutes to find high ground, to get out. It’s an impossible situation. So we need serious infrastructure improvement—and that’s Sacramento. The rest of my new district goes further north into Marysville and Yuba City, along the Sacramento River further north, and along the Feather and Yuba rivers—again, communities at high risk. Serious infrastructure needs to be devel-

oped. Levees need to be improved, upgraded, enhanced; otherwise, citizens are at risk, just as they were on Staten Island.

“This is our responsibility. This is not only a local responsibility and a state responsibility—this is a national responsibility. This is when we become a national community, looking out for each other, in providing the basic infrastructure to protect us. We also have infrastructure that is necessary for commerce: our roads, our highways, our Internet systems, our rail transportation systems. All of these infrastructure items are critical to the economic well-being of America in addition to the human and commerce safety of this Nation.”

**St. Lawrence Seaway.** Representative Kaptur: “I look at the St. Lawrence Seaway, and I think about Dwight Eisenhower, a great general, [who] led our forces in Europe, and came home and decided that America needed to create the St. Lawrence Seaway so that we would unlock the potential of the Upper Great Lakes and the Lower Great Lakes.



U.S. Dept. of Transportation

*Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio) pointed to the St. Lawrence Seaway, constructed in 1959 under President Eisenhower, “so that we would unlock the potential of the Upper Great Lakes and the Lower Great Lakes.” The photo shows the Seaway in 2010.*



Rep. Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.) noted that, “Gov. DeWitt Clinton perceived this Erie Canal as a way to transport goods and to open up the westward movement, to spark an industrial revolution. This is a view of the canal by W.H. Bartlett (1839).

“And you say to yourself, today, with some of the limited thinking that some exhibit—of course, no one in this Chamber would ever be accused of that!... But could we do the St. Lawrence Seaway again?...

”And believe me, the people that sent me here identify with the cause of jobs and economic growth and infrastructure investment in our country, to push us far beyond where perhaps Roosevelt and Eisenhower and Kennedy dreamed.”

**Washington/Hamilton Programs.** Garamendi responded to Kaptur: “How correct you are to look back to those heroes of the past that laid down the infrastructure. You can actually go back a little bit further. George Washington, in his first year as President of the United States, instructed Alexander Hamilton to develop an industrial policy. One part of that industrial policy was the development of the infrastructure for America’s commerce. And it was canals and it was ports and it was roads.”

**Hoover Dam.** Kaptur: “I’ve had the great privilege of traveling out West—I think I’ve probably been in every state and almost every Congressional District at one point in my career—and to look at the Hoover Dam. And as I admired the dam, I thought to myself, America has it in her to land a man on the Moon and to create NASA, but here at home, our public works—do we have the vision?

“Do we have a vision big enough today, in the 21st Century, to match what those who came before us gave

to us that put this continent together?”

**Erie Canal.** Representative Tonko: “Representative Kaptur made an interesting point that there was a sense of vision when they pursued the efforts with the St. Lawrence Seaway. There was a sense of vision in my district as a donor area and in Representative Higgins’ when Gov. DeWitt Clinton perceived this Erie Canal as a way to transport goods and to open up the westward movement, to spark an industrial revolution. That gave birth not only to a port called New York City, but also to a necklace of communities called mill towns, that became the epicenters of invention and innovation.

“So it’s that spark of vision that is the first step. And we’re going to denounce any of these creative opportunities to invest in nation-building by denouncing it as socialism?

Was President Eisenhower a socialist? Were all those who preceded him or followed him that came up with these great visions—a space program that gave us an unleashing of technology? No, they were thinkers. They were visionaries. They were leaders. That’s the first step. And then we develop policy from that vision. We tether it into real terms, and then we invest in the implementation of that policy. That’s America at her finest. If we look back at the Erie Canal history, when they did that, it wasn’t easy times. They were tough times; they were tough economic times. And so they stepped up to the plate and said, ‘We’re going to do this. It’s not easy to launch, but we’re going to do it because it’s the way through the tough times.’”

### ‘Engineering and Brain Power’

**50,000-Ton Press.** Kaptur: “I just want to end with one image, which is really hard to capture in words, but one of our companies in Cleveland has the only 50,000-ton press in the United States of America—Alcoa. It is seven stories in magnitude. I feel very privileged as a Representative to have been invited into the company to see this literally mammoth, magnificent machine be able to take parts and form them for industry as well as our defense systems. And it’s seven stories high! Three layers on three stories at the bottom just dealing with the hydraulics. The engineering and the brain power it takes to manufacture high-end goods is incredible.”