

# Infrastructure means climate security

April 21, 2021

By: DHSEM Secretary Bianca Ortiz-Wertheim, EMNRD Secretary Sarah Propst, and NMED Secretary James Kenney.

It's the week of Earth Day in 2021, and we're way past the point of closing our eyes and imagining the terrible effects of climate change. In New Mexico, we already endure year-round wildfire seasons. We already live through record-breaking droughts and heat waves. And like other parts of the nation and the world, we're already seeing how extreme weather can damage the infrastructure that supports every aspect of our lives.

In 2011, the [Los Conchas Fire](#) threatened the supply of electricity to roughly 400,000 customers and forced the Los Alamos National Laboratory to close for more than a week. In 2016, [severe lightning storms](#) caused power outages for nearly 130,000 New Mexicans. And in 2020 alone, climate-related disasters caused nearly [\\$100 billion](#) in damage to houses, businesses and public infrastructure nationwide.

There is a clear connection between climate change and the nation's crumbling infrastructure. And now is the time to take action against these threats.

The American Society of Civil Engineers already grades our country's infrastructure at a C-. Their most recent [report](#) highlights 46,000 bridges that are in "poor" condition, more than 100 major power outages that occur each year, and 6 billion gallons of treated water that we waste every day due to water main breaks.

And the longer we wait, the more dangerous climate change will become. Of the 90 weather-related disasters that New Mexico has [declared](#) since 1953, about half occurred in the last 15 years. Looking forward, the [US Bureau of Reclamation](#) projects that the Southwest could experience its first-ever official water shortage as early as this year.

Fortunately, New Mexico is already adopting bold policies to improve our infrastructure, our environment, and our public health.

During her first month in office, Governor Lujan Grisham signed an [executive order](#) to cut New Mexico's greenhouse gas emissions nearly in half by 2030. Since then, the Governor's action has re-shaped climate policy across the state.

In 2020, the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM) submitted over \$600,000 in climate change and resiliency planning applications under the federal Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program. Now, as we prepare for the next cycle of BRIC grants, DHSEM is working with dozens of counties, cities, and tribes on proposals to upgrade drainage systems, build electric microgrids, and curtail droughts by improving irrigation systems.

Following [legislation](#) in 2020, the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) worked with experts from across the state to draft a unified plan to modernize New Mexico's electric grid. Additionally, EMNRD led the development and adoption of nation-leading waste reduction rules for natural gas. In turn, these rules will lead to investments in oil and gas infrastructure that aim to eliminate routine methane venting and flaring – our state's largest contributor to climate change.

At the Environment Department (NMED), building resilient water and wastewater systems is a key focus of infrastructure financing programs. NMED recently lowered interest rates for wastewater and stormwater infrastructure loans, and the department is incentivizing communities to consider energy efficiency, water efficiency, and climate vulnerability in their infrastructure plans. NMED is also working with community drinking water systems on plans to safeguard our water supply from the threats of climate change.

Now, with the federal government's renewed commitment to our climate, we can do so much more.

[The American Jobs Plan](#) is an infrastructure plan, a healthcare plan, and a plan to stimulate the economy. But critically, it's also a plan for climate security. President Biden's proposal includes \$50 billion for infrastructure resilience, including more funds for BRIC grants. The plan directs \$100 billion to fortify the country's power infrastructure, which would help New Mexico achieve a zero-carbon electricity sector while also lowering energy bills. And the American Jobs Plan provides \$111 billion to improve water infrastructure, offering critical resources to provide clean and sustainable drinking water across rural New Mexico.

The fight against climate change – both within our state and within the federal government – goes far beyond the projects outlined here. But right now, the infrastructure crisis has captured our nation’s attention. We’re considering bold plans to re-build the systems that make our way of life possible – but we can’t just re-build. We must re-build more sustainably, in ways that take greater care of our natural resources and that better prepare our communities for extreme weather.

As President Biden says, we need to build back better. And when it comes to infrastructure and climate change, we couldn’t agree more.