

# Japan: Could Our Inner-City Communities Survive?

I am among the many who are stilled, freighted, and challenged by the tsunami and nuclear power breakdown in Japan. The tragedy raises all kinds of questions including a very self-ish one – what would we do if a tsunami hit the United States? As we see people missing, and watch the tragedy, I wonder how we would cope if anything like that happened here. What would happen if New Orleans happened in Washington, New York, or San Francisco? How prepared are we for tragedy?

President Barack Obama has talked about infrastructure devel-



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of water hit one of our major cities? Is this something that we have even thought about?

At a time when we must be prepared to do much more, it appears that we are prepared to do much less. In other words, we are in the middle of an economic meltdown,

children to school in dilapidated buildings, and we think it's okay. We know that we could invest more, and we could achieve more, but we have decided that we don't want, to quite move in that direction. We have to, we say, pay attention to money. But, we also have to pay attention to our future and to outcomes.

Among the outcomes we must be careful of are outcomes in education. It is challenging to find that so very many people think we should cut educational spending because we are in a budget crunch. Cutting education is like a farmer eating her seed corn, deciding to sacrifice consumption today for investment tomorrow. If we are to excel as a nation, we need to invest fully in education. We've not done so. Why do we have crumbling schools and state of the art prisons?

The United States leads the world in having educated people who are 55-64. Nearly 40 percent of us have AA or BA degrees. We have not improved our ability to deliver educational services in 30 years, so that nearly 40 percent of those 25 to 34 have AA and BA degrees. We lead in the education of seasoned people, but we rank 10th in the education of younger people. That speaks poorly to our possibilities for the future.

What must we do? We must spend the dollars that we need to strengthen our infrastructure. We must put dollars into education. This is hardly the time

others now, and even that might be disconcerting for those of us who are wedded to a paradigm that places the United States first.

If we take the call to wake up

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to cut back on an investment on the future. Instead of holding back, we must move forward, boldly, with our investment.

Japan should be a wake-up call for all of us. A country that was seen as stable has been destabilized by a natural disaster. Could that happen here? Further, what else could happen here to hurt us? We are so complacent about education that we run the risk of being run over by dozens of other world powers. Yes, there are dozens of

then we will look at infrastructure and opportunity. Can we learn from Japan, or will we simply offer the compassion that we offer to so many others? Learning means doing something different. Is that within the realm of our possibility?

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opment and the many ways that we might improve our highways, byways, and roads. This is a first step. It seems to me that 2001, 2005, and Japan are reminders that all of us need to be concerned about the quality of our infrastructure and our emergency responses to unexpected acts of nature. What might we do if 10-foot gales

and people are talking about spending less money. Doesn't Japan suggest we should spend more to shore up our infrastructure?

The fact is that we in the United States have chosen not to invest in infrastructure for more than a generation. We drive over potholes, look at detours in roads, and send

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