

[By Jim Pauley, Schneider Electric](#)

In his election night speech, President Obama called for a new era of bipartisanship to work through some of the immediate issues facing our nation – the fiscal cliff, unemployment rates, the economy, our energy dilemma. The list goes on.

In the weeks following, it was great to see Congress show its meddle in working together for the American people. The bipartisan agreement around the fiscal cliff is meaningful for a great number of reasons, but perhaps most importantly, it could lay the groundwork for a new age of cooperation between the two parties.

With the difficult negotiations of the fiscal cliff complete, there is a tremendous opportunity to build on this success with some easy wins that both sides of the aisle can agree upon. There will undoubtedly be more cliff-like negotiations over the next four years, so let's use the current bi-partisan momentum to get something easy done. Now is the time for Congress to pass meaningful and comprehensive energy efficiency legislation.

Democrats and Republicans alike have long been supportive of being more efficient in the ways we use our energy. Bipartisan energy efficiency legislation is, and has been, in the works with bills like Bass-Matheson (H.R. 4017) and Shaheen-Portman (S-1000). In fact, in September the Senate unanimously passed H.R. 4850, an energy efficiency measure that includes amendments pulled from Shaheen-Portman. The recently approved H.R. 6582 is another example - the American Manufacturing Technical Corrections Act requires agencies to update and disclose their advanced metering and sustainability agendas. And as recently as December, Reps. Cory Gardner (R-Colo.) and Peter Welch (D-Vt.) launched a bipartisan caucus to promote government use of energy-savings contracts with private firms.

The support for energy efficiency among our lawmakers is not in question. More often than not, the issue with getting these and other energy efficiency bills passed in full is almost always the riders attached to them. A controversial rider attached to an energy efficiency bill turns something positive and actionable into a black hole on Capitol Hill.

As we enter a new beginning of sorts in Washington, policymakers should pass a pure energy efficiency mandate that institutes measures like building energy labeling, energy efficiency benchmarking and evaluation, economic valuation for efficiency and energy saving performance contracts (ESPCs). And they need to do it without the "extras" that have sunk this legislation in the past.

With energy efficiency legislation, we can create jobs and save money. Not to mention mitigating a huge risk. Global electricity demand is on track to double by 2030 (according the IEA) and we can't continue to simply throw more generation at this problem. The U.S. currently ranks ninth in energy efficiency among the world's 12th largest economies. We need to intelligently curb our consumption and this begins with our nation's number one user of energy, the federal government.

One tool for rich savings comes from the use of ESPCs. The focus of the aforementioned bipartisan caucus led by Reps. Gardner and Welch, this financial model capitalizes on the flexibility and resources of the private sector to pay for energy saving capital upgrades using the future energy savings. The initial investment is provided by the private financial community and services are delivered by Energy Service Companies (ESCO). The financier is paid from the accrued energy savings, with the ESCO guaranteeing the savings amount. With the commercial building sector alone representing a \$40 billion energy savings opportunity, we can see how energy efficiency is an easy win for the energy industry.

Energy efficiency is not only our first available fuel source, but it provides tremendous opportunities for job creation. Energy efficient construction employs many skilled trade workers like electricians, engineers and contractors - in fact, a typical \$10 million ESPC creates 100 jobs.

It also impacts other industries that have been a priority in putting Americans back to work. For the industrial sector specifically, which has seen a decline in recent years, efficiency means better and more competitive cost management, more opportunity for sustainable manufacturing, and less risk in terms of volatile energy prices.

Energy efficiency touches many of the most critical issues facing our country. The time to act is now. With a hand in job creation, the economy and sustainability, government can't afford to be neutral on this.

Congress can further cement a bipartisan future with policy support for energy efficiency. This is a low risk opportunity to show they can continue working together, save money for tax payers and create jobs. Nothing partisan about that.