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To Keep Infrastructure From Falling Apart, Dedicate the Funding.

Private investors insist on it. Local governments need to build the same discipline.

With firefighters racing to contain dozens of large blazes across the country, wildfire season once again has communities fearing for their safety and property. In Los Angeles, where last year's devastating wildfires exposed a long-neglected water storage system, residents learned too late what happens when critical infrastructure is allowed to deteriorate.

L.A.'s water-supply failures were the predictable result of decades of deferred maintenance driven by political incentives that reward short-term optics. In L.A.'s Palisades fire, firefighters turned on hydrants only to find such low water pressure that their hoses were rendered useless. As many as 20 percent of the hydrants in the Palisades fire area suffered from the issue.

While the scale of those fires would have created problems for almost any response, lingering infrastructure problems inevitably catch up with us — and when they do, it becomes a major political problem for those in charge. As L.A.'s Democratic mayor, Karen Bass, faced a competitive runoff in the heavily blue city, she started to get serious about infrastructure, touting the city's first-ever Capital Infrastructure Program. That close-the-barn-door-after-the-horse-is-gone response shows up in cities and counties of every size and political makeup.

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