Can a Number Spark a Retrofit Revolution?

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Photo credit: Conway Yao via Flickr

"If numbers are purely objects of human thought, then why do they correspond so strikingly to the physical universe?"

▫ Calvin Clawson in *The Beauty and Magic of Numbers*

Right now 3591 is my favorite number. I know, I know - it's not even a prime number. It doesn't spell anything turned upside down or backwards. And, well, we all know it's not pi. It's not even some special number from that show *Numb3rs*.

Nope, it's just a seemingly random number. But I'm gaga for 3591 for one simple reason. It designates a bill that can change retrofitting as we know it.

Yep. I'm talking about S.3591. In these parts (ie, Capital Hill), it also goes by the memorable moniker of "Commercial Building Modernization Act."

I love 3591 as a number because it leads to some much bigger numbers I think we'll all really like. How about 77,000? That's the number of jobs this bill would create directly in the near term. (See the study).

In fact, this bipartisan legislation, introduced by Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME) along with Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), and Benjamin Cardin (D-MD), would significantly help drive job creation in what may be our hardest hit sectors, construction and manufacturing. Thousands of jobs would be created as thousands of commercial and multifamily buildings were retrofitted.

And then we'd be talking about even bigger numbers that even more people like: millions. That's how much money those buildings and those owners could be saving if we had this legislation in place. Example A (or should I say 1) is the Empire State Building, which is saving $4.4 million each year from its retrofit.

The bill, introduced a few weeks ago, extends and improves the existing federal tax deduction (Section 179D of the Internal Revenue Code) so it can easily be used for energy efficiency improvements. As buildings use the tiered deduction, it would also have the positive economic benefit of leveraging vast sums of private sector investment to execute the technology-neutral, performance-based retrofits.

This deduction has been around since 2005, part of the Energy Policy Act of 2005. But it was originally designed for new construction and unfortunately it has a history of being difficult to use. With our partners at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the Real Estate Roundtable (RER), our USGBC policy staff, particularly Lane Burt and Bryan Howard, worked closely with the sponsoring legislators and myriad industry stakeholders to develop a better, streamlined tax deduction, one that was designed specifically for spurring energy efficiency retrofits and overcoming costly and cumbersome application impediments.

So don't be shy. Go ahead and show your love for 3591. Make t-shirts. Change your ATM passwords. Write poems. Look, 3591 is a number that will create tens of thousands of jobs and save millions of dollars.

It's a number we can all get behind.

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1 comment

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Donna Isaacs 1 year 46 weeks ago

This is long overdue! I hope it will embrace the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation which would allow us to benefit from a culturally rich, resource-efficient built environment.

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