



The Silliest Sequester: Pumping the Brakes on Green Building Programs that Save Taxpayer Dollars

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I'm not an economist, but if I am trying to save money, I don't stop depositing money into my savings account.

I'm not a CEO, but if I had a division of a business that was turning a profit with every dollar invested, I would probably look at ways to increase investment, not reduce it.

But the coming sequester will make arbitrary across-the-board cuts in government program budgets, including extremely successful programs that pay for themselves in energy efficiency and green building. That's not a very effective way to reduce government spending.

Ironically, some folks in Congress seem to think the number of programs that cut energy and water bills and increase government employee productivity is a sign of inefficiency. Seems to me the only big number they should be concerned about is total taxpayer savings, not total number of programs.

Here are some frustrating examples of green building programs that will be hurt:

- [The ENERGY STAR program](#) - Not only do federal facilities save on energy bills when they buy ENERGY STAR appliances, but they use the Portfolio Manager benchmarking tool to stop energy waste in federal facilities. Overall, the program helped Americans save enough energy in 2011 to reduce their energy bills by [nearly \\$23 billion](#).
- [The Weatherization Assistance Program \(WAP\)](#) - WAP uses federal funding to fix leaks and broken equipment in low income homes, thereby slashing energy bills. This has not only saved 7 million families from wasting money every month, but also supported [tens of thousands of construction jobs](#). It saves the government money overall, as many of these same homes receive federal subsidies for their energy bills ([the LIHEAP program](#)), and with more disposable income there is less reliance on other governmental support programs like Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).
- The Department of Defense (DOD) green building program - DOD has more than 500 of the roughly 1,000 LEED-certified federal buildings. According to [a recent report by the National Academies of Science](#), these buildings substantially reduce energy and water use over traditional construction.
- The General Services Administration (GSA) green building program - The GSA is a green building leader in its facilities. [A PNNL study](#) found that LEED-certified GSA buildings use 27% less energy and cost 19% less to operate. Not only does that money stay in the Treasury, but GSA has further reduced costs by participating in the [LEED Volume program](#), which can reduce certification fees by up to 80%.

So which one of these tax-money-saving programs do you think should be cut?

If you answered none, maybe you should run for office.

2 comments

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Regina Philson

Environmental Scientist 3, GAP Concepts LLC

2 years 1 week ago

I'm not an economist either, but it makes economic sense to find ways to save money in other areas, such as building operations, rather than to cut human capital. Workers purchase products and services, which keeps the wheels of a capitalistic society in motion.



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