It is minutes past midnight here in the Marianas,

so, good morning.

I want to begin by thanking our witnesses –

Marianas Governor Torres, welcome Governor –

and the Governors from our other U.S. insular areas –

thank you all for joining us today for this oversight hearing

on President Biden's "Build Back Better" plan.

That plan is still under construction,

which is why I am holding today's hearing.

We know the plan will include a giant infrastructure package.

We also know how easy it can be

for the needs of the insular areas to be overlooked,

when major legislation like this is enacted.

Look how we were left out of Obamacare.

But our track record improved considerably

with enactment this month

of the American Rescue Plan.

All of our areas are receiving substantial assistance.

So, let us build on that momentum.

Let us build the case

for the infrastructure we need in the insular areas.

I hope today's hearing will, also, make the case

for a bipartisan approach to Build Back Better.

We have Governors of both parties,

who may not always agree on policy.

But one area I think you will all agree

is that the quality of life for our people

and the economic success of our islands

is closely tied to having first-rate infrastructure.

We want you, Governors, to have this opportunity

to inform Congress and the Administration

of the infrastructure and other needs

in each of your jurisdictions

that you want included in the Build Back Better plan.

You have direct, on-the-ground, managerial understanding

of the needs of your islands.

And we need to hear your ideas.

Of course, we all know the broad outlines of what is needed:

- Our only hospital in the Marianas is almost 40 years old, in need of modernization.

- We need modern health clinics on the islands of Rota and Tinian.

- Families cannot drink the water the comes out of the tap.

- We are pumping treated sewage into the same water we fish in and offer to tourists for vacations.

- Our electrical systems are old, expensive, and fossil-fuel based. And, when typhoons strike, exposed power lines on wooden poles are ripped down by the winds.

Our public utility corporation estimates modernization will cost over $800 million, I understand, a daunting sum.

So, we need to hear your vision today, Governors, and in the coming weeks for what your most important needs are.

And you, of course, need a commitment of funding

from the Biden administration

and from this Congress,

so our areas of America

can have an American quality of infrastructure.

Lastly, I think, we all need to make a commitment –

the federal government and the insular governments –

to build back better to standards

that are sustainable

and environmentally sound.

Because no areas know better than our insular areas

that the climate is changing.

And our islands will be dealing with repeated and powerful

typhoons and hurricanes, sea level rise, and the deterioration

of the coral reefs that protect our shores.

We are going to have to design and build

with that new reality in mind.

Hopefully, by doing so, we will save the repeated costs
of billions of dollars for disaster recovery
Congress has had to provide.

And we will also be sparing the individuals and families
and communities we represent
some of the trauma and painfully long periods of recovery
that we are even now experiencing.

So, again, I know you are all grateful
for the much-needed financial relief
Congress and President Biden
have provided in the American Rescue Plan.

Governor Torres, you have already announced
you will be using that money
to put furloughed workers back on salary.

And the Biden administration has also approved
several Marianas EDA grant applications
that the previous administration sat on.

The Biden administration also announced Monday
that you were getting the waiver of local match
for Lost Wages Assistance, Governor Torres.
Another of your requests
the previous administration ignored.

But despite all of this good news
our work is just begun.

Now it is time to build back better.

I now turn to the Ranking Member
for her opening statement.