

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Alan S. Lowenthal
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Oversight Hearing on

“The Importance of Domestically Sourced Raw Materials for Infrastructure Projects”

March 21, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And congratulations on your first hearing as chairman of this subcommittee. I look forward to working with you over the next two years on some of the most important energy and mining issues facing our nation today.

Despite the fact that these issues are often very contentious and very partisan, I hope that on this subcommittee we can have thoughtful and respectful debates and work to find areas of common agreement.

One area where we already are in agreement is your bill, H.R. 825, the Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act, which I am proud to be an original cosponsor of.

I think that bill is a tremendous win-win solution for getting more renewables on public lands, and allowing states and counties to directly share in the financial benefits.

We’ve been unable to get that bill to the House Floor in recent Congresses, but with your leadership on this subcommittee I hope we can change that.

Today we are here to talk about infrastructure, and more specifically, the intersection between our jurisdiction and infrastructure projects.

I will not deny that sand, gravel, stone, and other mined materials are necessary for roads, train tracks, and really anything else that needs to be built.

But while these minerals are important, we're almost completely self-sufficient in them, and they all have acceptable substitutes. So they're not, quote, strategic or critical by the definitions of the National Academies or the Department of Energy.

But that's an argument for another day.

Today, I think we should be looking at the bigger picture. Namely, what is going to happen to our infrastructure as the climate changes, and how [do](#) we build resiliency into that infrastructure?

This is where your bill, Mr. Chairman, I think could have a very positive impact by helping stimulate more clean energy on public lands.

But that bill would not be able to stop the impacts of climate change, because we're already observing them.

According to both NASA and NOAA, 2016 was the hottest year on record and 16 of the 17 warmest years on record have occurred since 2001.

We see our oceans becoming more acidic, wildfires burning longer, glaciers receding, permafrost melting, species encroaching on new areas, and storms becoming more devastating.

Many of these impacts already pose grave dangers to our infrastructure. Rising seas are flooding coastal roads and highways more often than they used to, overflowing rivers are damaging bridges and levees, and rapidly warming arctic conditions are exposing oil and gas wells to the open sea.

The longer we wait to take action, the worse these impacts will be. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, taking action [to reduce emissions](#) now can reduce costs in the future by up to \$7 billion per year.

But even if we brought our carbon emissions to zero today, The flip side of this is we will still face major impacts in the decades ahead, so we need to designing the infrastructure of today to withstand the climate of tomorrow.

We may not know exactly what will happen, but the trends we're already seeing can help us plan for higher sea levels, higher temperatures, and stronger storms. Smarter infrastructure planning now will save us a lot of money in the future.

The Obama Administration took steps in this direction with the 2016 release of the climate change guidance for doing reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, reviews.

It contains commonsense recommendations such as encouraging agencies to get the best available information on what the future state of the environment might be, and to try to make the project more resilient to climate change impacts.

This is smart planning.

Unfortunately, this guidance ~~is under attack~~/~~has recently been repealed~~ by the Trump Administration, which is on a mission to scrub the words "climate change" from the entire federal government.

This is a mistake.

Closing our eyes, ~~and~~ plugging our ears, and burying our heads in the sand—and gravel—will do nothing to stop the oceans and atmosphere from warming, or protect our roads and bridges from being submerged or washed away.

Of course, if this Administration has its way, we may not need them, since its policies are leading us to a future where the only form of transportation we may need along the coast are boats.

I thank the witnesses for being here, and I yield back the balance of my time.