

**Opening Statement (Rep. LaHood)**  
**National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Subcommittee**  
**HR 3600**  
**November 9, 2021**

Thank you Chairman Neguse and Ranking Member Fulcher for holding this hearing today, and for including my legislation, HR 3600 – the Route 66 National Historic Trail Designation Act.

I want to also acknowledge my Democrat counterpart, Congresswoman Grace Napolitano, from California for her work in introducing this legislation with me. She's been an integral partner in this effort since 2017.

Lastly, I want to especially welcome and thank our witness today, Casey Claypool, Executive Director of the Illinois Route 66 Scenic Byway. Casey's organization helps Illinois tourist attractions, small businesses, and local communities take full advantage of the opportunities Route 66 provides. I look forward to hearing her testimony during the panel later today.

I am proud to represent Illinois' 18th Congressional District in Congress. My district, comprised of 19 counties across central and west central Illinois, is full of rich American history in which travelers on Route 66 pass through every day.

By designating Route 66 as a federal trail, it would expand economic and historic development opportunities across all communities and states the Mother Road runs through – which includes Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

In my district, Route 66 winds through places like Lexington, Towanda, Bloomington-Normal, Atlanta, Lincoln, Elkhart, Springfield, and also stretches into the northern part of the state near Chicago.

After engaging with local community leaders when I was first elected to office, I quickly learned about Route 66's vital impact on small and rural communities like those in my district.

For example, in Atlanta, Illinois, the renewed emphasis on Route 66 tourism is directly responsible for revitalizing the town's economic base - increasing sales tax revenues in the community by 43%.

Another example is in Springfield, Illinois, where the Springfield Visitors Center welcomed 20,000 travelers from 74 different countries in 2019 citing the top two reasons for visiting was Abraham Lincoln and Route 66.

These are just two examples, but I can say with confidence that the highway's significance is a key driver of both domestic and international tourism, as well as local economic development for the areas and states that many of us in Congress, including several on this Committee, represent.

The Federal Government already recognizes the importance of Route 66. The highway currently benefits from the National Park Service's Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program, but this program expired in 2019 and is operating with very limited resources. My legislation would build off these efforts and ensure the programs' goals of preserving Route 66 can continue.

Additionally, last December Congress passed the Route 66 Centennial Commission to establish a 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary commission commemorating the historic significance of Route 66. Among other celebratory activities to coincide with its anniversary, a federal designation would provide the necessary resources to preserve and protect Route 66 for generations.

Mr Chairman, my legislation, HR 3600, is simple and straightforward – it would carry out the conclusion of a 1995 Congressionally authorized study called the “Route 66 Special Resource Study” that determined Route 66 meets the criteria in the National Trails System Act for designation as a National Historic Trail.

If signed into law, the bill would designate Route 66 as a National Historic Trail ensuring that the National Park Service will have the authority to assist and support states and local communities in preserving, promoting, and capitalizing on economic development from Route 66 for generations to come.

Before I wrap up, Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit for the record 8 letters of support from each state that Route 66 runs through supporting its federal trail designation.

I look forward to hearing the testimony from our witnesses and engaging in productive dialogue with my colleagues here today.

And with that, thank you and I yield back the remainder of my time.