

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE
REMOTE LEGISLATIVE HEARING

November 4, 2021

10:00 a.m. ET

Legislative Hearing on H.Res. 320, H.R. 4832, H.R. 5001, and H.R. 5345

Responses to Questions for the Record for Ms. Bidtah Becker, Associate Attorney,
Navajo Tribal Utility Authority

Question from Rep. Joe Neguse, CO

1. **Ms. Becker.** You described in your testimony how operation and maintenance of water and sanitation infrastructure is an ongoing problem for many tribal communities. How can the federal government assist tribes with O&M needs?

Ms. Becker Response: The federal government can assist tribes with O&M needs in two ways.

The first is funding. The Indian Health Service (IHS) is authorized to directly provide O&M support for Tribal water, sewage, and solid waste systems (25 U.S.C. 1632(b)). Congress has never appropriated any funding for IHS to provide assistance to Tribes for the day-to-day expenses related to effectively running a drinking water system. Congress should fund this authority. Funding this authority will ensure the federal investments in water infrastructure being made through the recent Congressional actions will be maximized.

The second is administrative. IHS should develop a method of identifying any systems in service that have ongoing challenges meeting their long-term O&M costs. In addition, the Administration can support a whole of government approach by reinvigorating the [Federal Tribal Infrastructure Task Force](#) established in 2007 and that appears to have been dormant during the prior Administration. IHS serves on this task force and the agencies can maximize their programmatic authorities to ensure that maximum programmatic efforts are being made to ensure that a qualified O&M work force is available and increased to service tribal communities. This task force can also assist tribes in increasing their desired capacity needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.