

-Oversight Hearing-

Infrastructure in Indigenous Communities: Priorities for American Jobs Plan.

OPENING STATEMENT

April 21, 2021

Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being with us virtually.

As you just noted, quality infrastructure is critically important to every part of this great nation.

On March 31, 2021, the President released his framework for infrastructure, the American Jobs Plan.

On April 13th, I had the privilege of attending a productive meeting in the Oval Office with President Biden and Vice President Harris on infrastructure.

President Biden shared my optimism that there is an appetite for bipartisanship, and I appreciated that he listened to my ideas on the scope of the bill and funding mechanisms.

We must be cautious about the goals of this bill and with the very definition of infrastructure.

Roads, bridges, and ports are undoubtedly infrastructure, and energy grids, broadband, and clean water can fit the definition as well.

But I have concerns that moving too far beyond this framework could sink the bill.

We also must make sure that this bill is paid for.

Both sides must be willing to set aside sacred cows and collaborate for the good of the American people for this bill to come together.

If there is not a serious funding source, we will not have a serious bill.

We are still very early in this process, and no legislative text currently exists.

Before being elected to public office, I saw firsthand the problems we had with a lack of infrastructure as a tug and barge operator along the Yukon River.

But I could also see the potential economic development that communities and rural villages could achieve if they were given the resources to put ideas into action.

Nowhere is infrastructure more important than in our Native communities.

Unfortunately, there is an immense need in Indian country.

These needs touch every sector, from healthcare facilities, roads and bridges, to broadband and housing.

While I share the desire that Congress must act to address all these sectors, healthcare facility construction and sanitation facility construction are two areas that this committee has under its jurisdiction.

The Indian Health Service Sanitation facility construction program currently has a backlog of \$2.6 billion dollars.

I am proud to be the cosponsor of a bill with Mr. O'Halleran that would address this backlog.

In addition, the Indian Healthcare facility construction program has a \$2.2 billion-dollar backlog for its High Priority construction list that was developed several decades ago.

These are just two examples that barely scratch the surface on the need in Indian country.

My hope is that we can work together in a bipartisan way to really do some good, and not simply put another band aid on Indian country infrastructure.

Investments in roads, bridges, broadband, and housing have strong merit.

As a member of the Transportation and Infrastructure I will continue to work with Ranking Member Westerman, who is also a fellow T&I member, to ensure that our communities have access to safe and reliable transportation.

In closing, I do believe it would be very helpful if we would also have representatives from the Administration testifying as they will be the ones implementing any bill Congress passes.

I again want to thank the witnesses and I look forward to hearing their testimony.