

-Oversight Hearing-

Examining Federal Facilities in Indian Country.

OPENING STATEMENT

June 17, 2021

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

As you mentioned, today's hearing is being held to examine federal facilities in Indian country.

As I have said before, quality infrastructure is critically important to every part of this great nation.

I've seen firsthand the problems we had with a lack of infrastructure in Alaska

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.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service are the primary agencies charged with providing services to tribal communities.

Unfortunately, many facilities in tribal communities are in dire need of replacement or need extensive repair and maintenance.

At an April 2021 hearing, this subcommittee heard firsthand the drastic need for sanitation facility investment.

The IHS sanitation facility construction program currently has a backlog of more than \$2 billion dollars.

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

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

At the Bureau of Indian Affairs, public safety and justice infrastructure also continues to be inadequate.

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

Earlier this year, I had the privilege of attending a productive meeting in the Oval Office with President Biden on infrastructure.

I share 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.

As I've said before, we must be cautious about the goals of this bill and with the very definition of infrastructure, and we 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.

Most importantly, we must listen to the tribes.

There are a number of ways Congress can improve infrastructure beyond just injecting billions into budget accounts.

Many tribes continue to show they are better equipped to manage federal programs and the infrastructure it supports.

Indian Self-Determination Act is a powerful tool that more and more tribes are using because they know what is best for their communities.

Native communities should continue to design and build programs and facilities that work for them and Congress and the Administration should partner with them in those efforts.

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.

In closing, I am pleased that after nearly six months we are joined here today by the officials from Administration.

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