

Thank you Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, and Members of this Committee for giving me an opportunity to contribute to the discussion surrounding the upcoming infrastructure package. This year, my office has already hosted more than 20 town halls, and infrastructure consistently remains a top 3 topic for discussion. So today, I would like to hit a few points related to surface transportation, water infrastructure, airport programs, and broadband.

I represent the big First District of Kansas, arguably one of the largest Ag producing district in the country. With more than 60 counties in central and western Kansas, and spanning over two-thirds of the state, you can see why folks back home call it “the Big First.”

Agriculture has a large reliance on surface transportation to get our commodities, such as wheat, sorghum, soybeans, corn, cotton, milk, distillers grain, ethanol, pork, and beef to market. In fact, I often brag, the two things American agriculture does is produce more per acre and get our goods to market cheaper and more reliably than any other country in the world. But I’m afraid our infrastructure has been left somewhat neglected over the past decade or so, and America is suffering.

With the FAST Act expiring next year, developing or extending programs to keep our roads and bridges well maintained, such as the Highway Trust Fund or the BUILD grant program, is of critical importance. Long-term funding for surface transportation infrastructure allows communities to better plan and invest in their communities, and ultimately helps the rural economy continue to grow.

In addition to surface transportation, water infrastructure is of vital importance to my district, whether through availability of quality water sources, or upgrading the aging water towers, levees, and dams, as well as underground pipes in many municipalities across my state. Many communities in my district are having to dig new wells due to declining water availability or quality, which is a costly burden that many of these small towns cannot afford. Similarly, the aging state of water towers and pipes creates health and safety concerns, in addition to issues with water delivery. Ensuring that rural communities are able to adequately maintain their water infrastructure and deliver safe drinking water to constituents is a priority, as is guaranteeing availability of quality water sources for agricultural purposes. Furthermore, flood mitigation efforts through preservation and maintenance of levees, locks, and dams protect homes and businesses, and allow communities to expand and invest in new development.

The Essential Air Service program and the Airport Improvement Program are also programs that continue to help the rural communities in my district. Through the Essential Air Service program, the cities of Hays, Liberal, Salina, Garden City, and Dodge City, Kansas are able to provide passenger service to multiple major air hubs, as well as access to economic development opportunities. Furthermore, these communities utilize the Airport Improvement Program to maintain airport infrastructure, ensuring traveler safety and allowing small airports to plan their investments for the future.

I understand that broadband is not within the jurisdiction of this Committee, however I feel that any infrastructure package should include broadband in the conversation. In nearly every town hall that I have held since coming to Congress, access to broadband has consistently been a top issue for my constituents. The high cost of broadband deployment coupled with a low population and vast expanses in rural America makes infrastructure deployment challenging and expensive for many communities. Yet our society continues to transition more and more toward digital connections, whether for education, healthcare, or even agriculture, making a reliable and affordable internet access no longer optional.

Overall, as we move closer toward an infrastructure package, I ask that the Committee take into consideration the unique challenges facing rural communities when it comes to infrastructure investments. Surface transportation, water infrastructure, airport programs, and broadband are of critical importance to my district as well as rural America, and thus for the American economy. As a true investment for our children's and grandchildren's sake, and for the economic future and prosperity of America, I ask for robust support for the programs mentioned. Infrastructure is something the whole country can rally behind, giving us all a common goal and purpose; it can be the start of a new day, a day when Republicans and Democrats once again work together to make our country strong for the future.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to share about the impacts that these issues have on the State of Kansas, and I yield back the remainder of my time.