

Testimony to the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
April 14, 2021
Submitted by Congressman Ted Budd

Good morning Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, thank you for the opportunity to speak before this committee today. Let me begin by saying that, unlike some of my colleagues you've heard from today, I am not here to request any earmarks.

Earmarks are a corrupting influence and act as “the gateway drug for overspending,” as the late-Senator Tom Coburn said. Earmarks are loved by lobbyists and career politicians, and hated by government watchdogs and taxpayers. I am disappointed the Democrats have brought back the pork-barrel earmark system that will only further add to the mounting national debt.

Instead of requesting earmarks, we should enact legislation like the Generating American Income and Infrastructure Now (GAIIN) Act. This bill would require the government to actually sell off parts of its debt and distribute the proceeds to low-income communities below the national poverty line for infrastructure projects that would directly improve their economic viability. This bill is a fiscally responsible way to invest in infrastructure while also promoting workforce development.

In the same vein, I ask that the committee include my Fair and Open Competition Act, H.R. 1284, in the surface transportation bill. This bill prevents federal agencies and recipients of federal assistance from requiring contractors to sign controversial project labor agreements (PLAs) as a condition of winning a construction contract. This would ensure that taxpayer funded construction contracts are awarded through fair and open competition. This guarantees the best value for hardworking taxpayers by prohibiting a rigged federal procurement process that discriminates against many small construction businesses. Many of the bill's 45 cosponsors have signed onto a letter asking the committee to include this proposal. I will be delivering this letter later today.

I also ask the committee to preserve the previous Administration's National Environmental Policy Act regulations and One Federal Decision policy. Last summer, the Trump Administration released the first revised NEPA regulations in over 40 years. The old rules increased the time and cost for federally-funded infrastructure projects. The reformed regulations will speed up the notoriously slow environmental review process.

The One Federal Decision policy consolidated permitting and authorization decisions into one process and provides deadlines to reduce delays and cut through the red tape. I constantly hear from state and local stakeholders about how NEPA regulations and agency reviews slow down the process to get projects up and running. It is unacceptable for vital infrastructure programs to be delayed by years of bureaucratic red tape. I am glad the last Administration understood this and implemented a goal to complete environmental reviews in two years or less.

Solutions like the GAIIN Act, the Fair and Open Competition Act, NEPA reform, and the One Federal Decision policy will reduce costs and speed up infrastructure projects. I urge you to include these reforms within the surface transportation reauthorization bill.

We need to get back to basics. Let's fix our country's infrastructure by removing red tape, efficiently and effectively planning projects, competitively bidding them, and getting shovels into the ground. That way, taxpayers will know that they are getting the best bang for their buck. At the end of the day, it's not our money, it's the people's money. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the proposals I mentioned today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.