

REMARKS:

- Chair DeFazio and RM Graves
 - thank you for holding today's Member Day Hearing
 - and elevating the importance of an infrastructure package
 - that builds on the Biden Administration's vital
 - American Jobs Plan.

- When I think about infrastructure
 - I think about the year that we've had on the CCoFC
 - A year marked not only by a global pandemic
 - but also historic wildfires and storms.

 - Now more than ever before, we must invest in our communities
 - to build back more resilient, more climate-smart infrastructure.
 - to give our communities the certainty they need
 - as they inevitably face the next
 - climate-induced disaster.

- We must also pursue an infrastructure package rooted
 - in environmental justice.

- When I think about communities on the frontlines of climate change,
 - I think about residents of Watsonville and Pajaro in my district
 - who live in constant fear of a flood.

- For over fifty years, the Army Corps of Engineers' Pajaro River Flood Risk Management Project
 - remained stalled
 - because of its low "benefit-to-cost" ratio
 - or BCR
 - a metric that is biased against low-income communities.

- Now what the BCR doesn't take into account
 - is the fact that economically disadvantaged areas
 - do not necessarily imply a lack of economic returns.

- In the case of the Pajaro Valley
 - agriculture is a \$1 billion industry
 - supplying the majority of our nation's strawberries.

- But it shouldn't just be about economic returns.
 - The undersized and fragile Corps levees on the Pajaro River
 - have failed multiple times
 - since their construction in 1949,
 - resulting in loss of life and placing thousands of people
 - in harm's way.

- By historically prioritizing flood control projects in affluent areas
 - the Corps has been putting projects that protect property values
 - ahead of projects that save lives.

- Now, with this infrastructure package, we have an opportunity
 - to right that wrong.
- We also have an opportunity to overcome another hurdle
 - in addressing the severe shortage of affordable housing,
 - to invest in community health centers and hospitals in rural areas,
 - and to expand long-term care services under Medicare.
- Affordable housing was already reaching crisis-levels in the Central Coast,
 - and this has been exacerbated by the pandemic.
- In order to build back better, we must acknowledge that the fundamental right to housing
 - can only be achieved if we increase access
 - and eliminate discriminatory practices.
- The bruising pandemic has highlighted
 - the inequities that have long existed in our healthcare systems.
- We must safeguard critical infrastructure and services,
 - to defend vulnerable communities.
- These investments will help hundreds of thousands of Americans,
 - including my constituents in California.

- Before we embark on any of these,
 - we need to make our definition of infrastructure clear.
- Because yes we need to build smarter, safer highways, roads, and bridges
 - and I will be pushing for Central Coast priorities in
 - each of those categories
- But I also want to note that the Biden infrastructure plan
 - takes a broad approach to infrastructure
 - including delivering on clean drinking water
 - renewing our electric grid

- and providing high-speed broadband to all Americans.
- I am focused on making sure my communities
 - particularly those that have historically been left out
 - of federal funding opportunities
 - also see those benefits.
- I look forward working with my colleagues on a package that
 - mitigates socio-economic disparities,
 - advances racial equity,
 - and promotes affordable access to opportunity.