

Mr. Chairman and fellow Committee Members, I would like to start by thanking you for the chance to speak on behalf of the people of my district.

As many of you may know, I'm lucky to be representing the beautiful mountains of Western North Carolina. The people of my district, like many you've heard from today, share an interest in cutting wasteful government spending, eliminating fraud in federal programs, and sparking economic development in rural communities. I'd like to speak on each of those points for a moment, before turning our focus to another area my community desperately needs help in.

First, is wasteful spending. I'm sure we can all agree that one of the former administration's most troublesome traits was finding new ways to waste taxpayer money. One prime example is the Direct File program by the Internal Revenue Service.

In 2024, the IRS spent over \$24 million dollars launching the Direct File tax preparation program, which had less than a 1% use rate. This year, the IRS is spending millions more to relaunch the program. Last week, Rep. Adrian Smith and I introduced the FAIR PREP Act, which would prohibit the IRS from implementing the Direct File program, or any similar tax preparation program. Simply put, the IRS should not be both tax preparer and tax auditor for the American people.

Shifting gears, last year I spoke to this committee about an issue plaguing our nation's unemployment system. Federal law requires that Americans on unemployment search for and accept work, but it does not require that they interview for a job when offered, which is arguably the most important part of a job search.

We must protect the integrity of our unemployment system. That's why I introduced the Unemployment Integrity Act last Congress, and plan to do so again this year. The UI Act makes showing up to an interview a mandatory part of the job search and strengthens audit requirements to protect against further abuse of our UI system. This is a simple, commonsense way to protect against fraud and return dignity to our unemployment system.

Last year, I also spoke to you about difficulties communities face getting environmentally contaminated sites, called brownfields and Superfund sites, developed. To address this issue, and to spark economic development in historically untouched areas, I introduced the Economic Opportunity for Distressed Communities Act. This Act would designate hazardous waste sites as Opportunity Zones, encouraging clean-up, development, and revitalization of areas that may otherwise sit contaminated for decades to come.

Finally, last September, my district was ravaged by Hurricane Helene. Water crested as high as 40 feet in some areas of NC's mountains, and recovery continues to be a challenge. One solution that I am urging this committee to consider is designating disaster declared areas from Hurricane Helene as Opportunity Zones, as was done in 2005 in the Gulf Opportunity Zone Act of 2005. While the GO Zone Act of 2005 is markedly different than the current Opportunity Zone program that we know today, I believe that Western North Carolinian's whose lives have been uprooted by Helene deserve the same important investments as the communities affected by

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Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma back in the early 2000s. I am currently working on legislation in this area, and ask that you work with me to ensure WNC has access to every available resource to recover from the devastation of Hurricane Helene.

Thank you again for letting me testify on behalf of the people of Western NC. I urge you to consider moving each of the bills I have mentioned today, and I yield the remainder of my time.