

**Chair Teresa Leger Fernández – Opening Statement**  
**Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States**  
**Remote Oversight Hearing on “Examining Federal Facilities in**  
**Indian Country”**  
**June 17, 2021**

- Good Afternoon. Today’s Subcommittee hearing will focus on “*Examining Federal Facilities in Indian Country.*”
- We’ve had a national discussion for several months now over the need to rebuild the Nation’s failing infrastructure.
- We recognize that our Nation is not competitive, our people are not safe, and our economies are hurt if we don’t invest in our infrastructure.
- And if we do invest, we are also investing in job creation and boosting our economic growth.
- Those same arguments for investing in our national infrastructure are the same, but more fundamental in Indian Country.
- The national average age of hospital facilities in the United States is about 10.6 years, it's about 40 years for Indian Health Service facilities. And 52% of those facilities are grossly undersized. They are crowded and unsafe.
- The pandemic made us painfully aware of how the shortage of IHS facilities led to some of the highest levels of death from COVID-19.

- At the current rates of funding for IHS, if a new facility were built today, it would not be replaced for an additional 400 years. That means multiple generations seeking health care in an outdated, sometimes unsafe, facility.
- The pandemic also shone its unforgiving light on the plight of Native American children who didn't have access to broadband to attend school remotely. But when those children return to school, they are often learning in buildings that are leaking, that deserve to be condemned, and that have been sitting on priority waiting lists for years.
- The BIA, BIE, and IHS collectively operate or fund 1,834 federal facilities, ranging from fire stations, garages, warehouses, communication repeaters, and utility plants, to hospitals, clinics, and schools. Most of which are in dire need of repair.
- Also, in 2018, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights concluded that Congress must fully fund tribal law enforcement agencies, tribal courts, and tribal detention facilities to allow those criminal justice components to fulfill their responsibilities to tribal citizens.
- If we were to address the facilities backlogs and federally funded facilities in Indian Country, the federal government would need at least \$56 billion to address backlogs and deferred maintenance across BIA, BIE, and IHS.

- I know I just gave you a lot of numbers, but I think it's important that we quantify this enormous problem. And let's remember that for every BIE facility there are dozens of students curious and eager to learn and for every IHS facility there are mothers, fathers, and elders that need care.
- As you will hear today from our witnesses, there is a need for long-lasting and continuous investments for federal facilities in Indian Country. These investments can last generations and begin to heal the disparities we witnessed throughout the pandemic.
- Tribes, tribal advocates, the Government Accountability Office, and even the Department of Interior itself have recognized these issues for years, but still not enough has been done. We cannot let today's hearing become another footnote in a future report or hearing. We must use this opportunity to develop the record and then push to get full appropriations to build these facilities. To fail is to ignore the first American, to fail is to ignore yet again our trust responsibilities. We must not fail.
- As I've said before to this Subcommittee, we are at a unique moment in history where we can have a lasting impact on Indigenous communities' infrastructure. I look forward to the subcommittee and full committee's support for these vital infrastructure projects.

- Our distinguished witnesses will highlight these needs and tell stories that will spur us to action.
- I now recognize Ranking Member Young for his opening statement.