

May 1, 2019

Rep. Elaine G. Luria (VA-02)

Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Member Day Statement

Thank you, Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, and to my colleagues on the Committee for giving me this opportunity. I would like to bring a few issues to the Committee's attention that are critical not only for Coastal Virginia, but for America.

- The Chesapeake Bay is one of our nation's greatest natural resources. It generates \$33 billion in economic value annually and hosts one of the most important sites for ecological diversity in North America. Thanks to innovative partnerships across the state and federal level, great progress has been made in preserving, protecting, and restoring this crucial ecosystem.

The Chesapeake Bay Program Reauthorization Act (H.R. 1620) will fully fund the Chesapeake Bay Program for the next five years, ensuring that states get the resources they need to comply with their obligations to protect the Bay. The vast majority of funding for this Program will go directly toward states within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed to help them control pollution and manage runoff into the tributaries that feed into the Bay. This bipartisan bill will help ensure that the Bay remains a vibrant and beautiful destination for the next generation. I urge the committee to take up the consideration of the Chesapeake Bay Program Reauthorization Act this month.

- I also encourage the Committee to act on climate resiliency. For Coastal Virginians and residents of coastal communities throughout the U.S., sea level rise and recurrent flooding aren't the basis of political talking points or challenges for the future. They are problems we are dealing with right now, today, this very moment. As the Committee develops an infrastructure package, please ensure we are providing communities the resources they need to adapt to rising sea levels.
- Another issue the Committee must prioritize in any infrastructure bill is expanding rural broadband. Access to high-speed internet is essential to participate in the modern economy. Reliable, fast internet access can connect people to other communities, health providers, jobs, and even allow them to start their own businesses. Although we have made progress in connecting rural areas to broadband, more work needs to be done. On Virginia's Eastern Shore in my district, it will cost an estimated \$30 million to adequately expand broadband access. The Committee must act to ensure we make the necessary investments in this critical infrastructure so rural Americans are not left behind.
- Other, essential investments in infrastructure cannot be forgotten for rural America. This includes projects such as expanding and modernizing our sewer systems on Virginia's Eastern Shore, which will provide a much-needed backbone for economic development. Directing federal money to prioritize basic infrastructure needs like this would help economic growth, improve the health of our community, and raise quality of life across America.

- Finally, I encourage the Committee to fund investments in America's waterways, and specifically the Port of Virginia. Nearly 10 percent of Virginia's working residents work port-related jobs, and our port enjoys unique advantages with its deep waters, central location, and access to rail. The administration's budget did not include funding for important dredging projects, so Congress must come to the rescue. Ever-larger ships are carrying record amounts of goods that benefit both Virginia and America as a whole. It makes sense to make room in the federal budget for these investments which will further promote nationwide economic growth.

In addition to the importance of dredging for the Port of Virginia, it is as equally pivotal for secondary channels. For example, the Little Machipongo River is a primary aquaculture hub on Virginia's Eastern Shore, producing some of the largest numbers in shellfish in the county. The navigability of this waterway is vital to the region's aquaculture industry, which helps employ hundreds of Virginians.

Thank you again for this opportunity to highlight the importance of investing in infrastructure to our districts, our constituents, and our nation. I ask members of this committee on both sides of the aisle to come together to address the critical infrastructure needs of coastal communities like mine. The American people are counting on us and future generations are depending on the investments we make in this Congress. I have faith that my colleagues will put partisanship aside and I stand ready to assist with finding common ground to address this imperative challenge.