

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

April 18, 2023

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
2163 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen,

I appreciate the opportunity to testify about my priorities and concerns as representative of Washington state's 8th congressional district.

Washington state depends on many facets of infrastructure for its trade, resiliency, and economic success. Washington's 8th District, my district, depends on smooth, connected roads, reliable public transportation, and comprehensive freight rail to ensure agricultural goods can be transported, economies can grow, and communities can access the services they need. We also depend on our critical water infrastructure to allow our agricultural communities to flourish and build drought-resistant infrastructure in the West.

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Implementation

As Ranking Member Larsen knows from his leadership on this issue, small and mid-size communities play a critical role in powering Washington's economy. I am eager to partner with this committee to find ways to consolidate, standardize, and streamline grant application efforts to ensure all communities can benefit from grant funding under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Small and mid-sized communities face several barriers when applying for funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. One of the significant obstacles is the lack of resources and capacity to develop competitive grant applications. These communities may not have the staff or expertise to navigate the complex application process, which can involve detailed planning, engineering, and financial analysis. Moreover, many of these communities may not have the necessary data and information to meet the eligibility requirements for the grants. For example, they may not have conducted a comprehensive transportation or infrastructure assessment, which is essential for grant applications. Financing is also an issue: Some of these grants require matching funds and communities may not have the financial resources to meet the matching requirement, making it difficult to compete for the grants. Another constraint is when grant programs are reimbursable by DOT which I will touch on further in my testimony.

DOT implementation of Culvert Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) Program

In 2018, the Supreme Court ruled that Washington state had an obligation to restore salmon habitat access to meet its promises to the tribes. Washington State will have to replace each fish-blocking culvert with a

larger design. It's estimated the ruling will require replacement of about 1,000 state-owned culverts at a cost of about \$4 billion to the state. The state has until 2030 to meet that requirement.

For the first time, a new funding stream was championed in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to provide significant funding to remove salmon-blocking culverts which will improve thousands of miles of salmon habitat. However, my office has heard concerns about how the program is structured from local fish passage project sponsors.

Cities and counties are managing a tremendous amount of aging transportation infrastructure. Local governments and their associated city councils and county commissioners are prioritizing transportation projects based on the needs and safety of their traveling public. These same local governments also have lists of transportation related fish passage barriers, that despite being serviceable, would be a benefit to salmon recovery if replaced.

However, eligibility requirements for executing grant agreements to receive Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) funding can take local government staff six months to two years to complete at an up-front cost of \$100k. I am also deeply concerned by the cost share requirement and the current administration of grants on a reimbursable basis which further constrains the ability of local governments to capitalize on these funds. Local governments have a limited capacity for public works based on the revenue from local sales and property taxes. Therefore, transportation projects done purely for the benefit of salmon recovery are addressed when easy to obtain outside funding and staff capacity are available. I'd like to see flexibility in the matching requirements and other barriers for smaller communities.

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization

Aviation is important to Washington state. From our commercial planes used by our constituents every day to the small and mid-sized, mission-critical airports used to coordinate firefighting, we need to ensure our aviation infrastructure stays strong.

However, we have recently seen flights cut at some of our smaller airports- like Pangborn near Wenatchee- and we have heard continual concerns about the lack of airline pilots and shortages in the workforce. We need to think creatively about how to incentivize people into this work, and how to be strategic about recruitment. As a state with high exports, many businesses with international footprints, and constituents across the state that want to travel more as we emerge from cautions of the pandemics, having consistent, reliable flights is essential.

To that end, I am working with my Republican colleague Kelly Armstrong to introduce the *American Aviator Act*. This bill, a companion to Senators Baldwin and Hoevan, would establish a pilot program for flight training services to veterans. We have over 500,000 Veterans in Washington State, with roughly 50,000 in the 8th District. If you dedicated your life to protecting our country, it's our responsibility to make sure you receive the best service and care possible. And part of a healthy, purposeful life is access to a good job. The bill increases career opportunities for veterans and aims to break down barriers that may impede veterans from pursuing careers in aviation. The bill also helps ensure there is an adequate future supply of qualified pilots to continue to provide safe and reliable air service to rural airports across the country. I hope you will consider this bipartisan, bicameral legislation as you build the FAA reauthorization.

Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA)

One of my priorities this Congress is the *Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act*, which I plan to reintroduce in the coming months. This bipartisan legislation makes common-sense fixes and includes parts of previously introduced legislation to improve the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act of 2014 (WIFIA), a law which created a federal credit program administered by the EPA for eligible water and wastewater infrastructure projects.

Specifically, my *WIFIA bill* would broaden funding and financing eligibility to state and federal projects and entities. This includes state-led water storage projects, transferred works of the Bureau of Reclamation, and congressionally authorized Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) projects. It would also authorize the use of collaborative project delivery methods for WIFIA projects, allowing more flexibility and reducing time and cost of the project allow certain federal water infrastructure loans to have maturity dates of up to 55 years; reauthorize USACE WIFIA program through FY2026l and direct the USACE to implement its WIFIA program, which it has not done despite its authorization in 2014.

Together, these provisions will allow our local water operators access to critical loans and long-term, stable funding for water infrastructure projects in Washington state. Funding these local projects will keep our water clean and ensure a reliable supply of water while keeping costs low for ratepayers.

Thank you for your consideration of these priorities as you develop legislation for our aviation industry and critical water infrastructure this year and continue oversight efforts of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law implementation. I look forward to partnering with you and your colleagues on both sides of the aisle to deliver for the constituents of the 8th district of Washington state.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kim Schrier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and "S".

Kim Schrier, M.D.
MEMBER OF CONGRESS