

Representative Emanuel Cleaver, II Testimony before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Member Day Hearing, Wednesday May 1, 2019

Good Morning and thank you, Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves, for holding this hearing and giving Members the opportunity to participate in this process and share our priorities with the committee. As I'm sure you are aware, our nation's infrastructure is in dire need of upgrades. According to the 2017 report from the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), American infrastructure received a D+ grade, the same grade we received from the ASCE's report in 2013. Essentially, this means that the United States is barely treading water when it comes to meeting our infrastructure needs. I don't know about you, but if one of my four children had received even one D on their report card, let alone two in a row, we'd be having a serious sit-down—a sit down much less cordial than the one we're currently having today.

For a nation as wealthy as ours—a nation that claims to have the best economy in the world—I find it perplexing that we have even reached this point. Congress should take it personally and be embarrassed that we have allowed the state of our national infrastructure to degrade to the point where the World Economic Forum's Basic Requirement Index ranks the U.S. outside of the top 10 developed nations. The U.S. should not be ranked outside the top 10 of any index, yet here we are, consistently coming up short when it comes to national infrastructure needs.

And make no mistake, our shortsightedness when it comes to investing in our nation's infrastructure is undoubtedly going to cost American taxpayers in the long term. Currently, the poor state of our infrastructure is costing our citizens roughly \$200 billion a year. That's \$200 billion just to maintain a D+ rating. Though the price of new roads, or bridges, or levees may be costly, the status quo is simply unsustainable.

The cure to all our nation's infrastructure woes is to simply *invest* in our nation's infrastructure. I know, crazy right? If you want something to improve, you simply need to invest time and resources into it. According to a recent study by the Business Roundtable, for every dollar spent restoring our infrastructure, it produces nearly four dollars in economic benefits. Now, who wouldn't take four times their return on investment? It would be foolish not to. So, what's stopping us from reestablishing America as a global leader with world-class infrastructure that also brings back significant return on investment?

Much like a shot of cough syrup, an infrastructure bill may be a tough political pill to swallow, but the benefits will make our economy feel much better down the line. If we do not find a way to treat our nation's degrading infrastructure, we will see more roads crumbling, bridges failing, and cities struggling to meet budgetary needs. Let me relay some of the symptoms my congressional district is facing.

In Missouri, the ASCE gave us an infrastructure grade of C-. Slightly better than the national average, but still nothing to write home about.

As I'm sure you're aware, I know Ranking Member Graves is very aware, Missouri was one of the Midwestern states hit hard by recent storms and the severe flooding that came with. Over 168,000 acres of land was flooded when the Missouri River overtopped and broke through levees. In response, the Governor has requested a federal disaster declaration for the affected counties. I have personally toured the devastation in my district, seeing firsthand the impact of our deficient levee infrastructure. If we are to

mitigate damage from future floods, which we will see more of thanks to climate change as well as the disaster funding required to repair that damage, more attention and funding is needed.

When it comes to Missouri's roads and bridges, we aren't faring much better. Missouri has the 7th most bridges and miles of road in the nation, yet we maintain them with the 4th lowest gasoline tax. It's no wonder that 12.5% of bridges in Missouri are structurally deficient, almost 4 points higher than the national average. And these deficiencies have a real-world negative economic impact on the constituents I represent. On average, Missouri residents spend \$604 annually on vehicle repairs and operating costs, roughly \$75 more than the national average.

The Buck O'Neil bridge, spanning the Missouri River in Kansas City, was declared deficient in 2017. With a lot of coordination, the State agreed to a \$200 million replacement of the bridge. The City and regional partners pledged to cover half the cost and MODOT earmarked \$51 million. The project also received a \$25 million BUILD grant. This bridge sees 44,000 vehicles pass each day, and yet is still about \$60 million short of the total needed to complete the replacement over the next several years.

Federal funding, such as the BUILD grants (formerly TIGER Grants), are extremely important to help cities and states implement large infrastructure projects. Additionally, more attention should be focused on rural areas, which do not always have the capacity to compete for competitive federal grants. Though they do not have the hefty price tags of urban capital projects, rural infrastructure projects are crucial to the rural economy and livelihood of small towns.

The last major sector of infrastructure that I believe Congress must address is our stormwater and drinking water infrastructure. In 2012, Missouri and the EPA estimated that the state needs \$9.6 billion to address the needs of our water infrastructure over the next 30 years. Kansas City, the largest city in Missouri, is currently under a consent decree to spend \$2.5 billion to separate stormwater and wastewater systems over 25 years. The city is doing everything it can to meet the targets set by the federal government, but continues to run into challenges, mostly due to lack of help from the federal government. Because of this, the city utility has been forced to raise water rates to over \$100 per household, which is unaffordable for most city residents. Thankfully, the city is renegotiating with the EPA on the structure of the consent decree, but federal funding would have saved my constituents from paying exorbitant water rates for the last several years.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today about the infrastructure needs of Missouri's Fifth Congressional District.