

Congressman Kevin Hern (OK-01)
Infrastructure Member Day Hearing

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5 minutes

Opening:

- *{Briefly explain your background with infrastructure issues, stemming from your work as on the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.}*
- Years of inaction have allowed American infrastructure to fall into a state of disrepair, to the point that the American Society of Civil Engineers recently gave American infrastructure a grade of D+ on their annual Infrastructure Report Card.
- We pride ourselves on being on the cutting edge of industry and innovation, the preeminent power in the world - and yet we cannot get even a passing grade on our infrastructure.
- Some of my colleagues have decided to expand the definition of infrastructure to include anything they want, turning what has previously been a bipartisan issue into a party-line fight for the first time.
- Our roads and bridges need attention. Bureaucracy has held up long-overdue projects for decades, resulting in crumbling infrastructure - the real infrastructure.

Opening Specifics:

- There are a few simple fixes to get our infrastructure back on track.
- First, we need to cut the red tape. Bureaucracy is holding up essential projects that would improve our communities. Redundant oversight is killing progress.
- We need to rebuild our bridges and roadways, tens of thousands of which are currently “structurally deficient,” posing dangers to our communities and needlessly wearing out the vehicles that drive on them.
- Rural broadband needs serious expansion, as nearly 40% of Americans living in rural areas lack sufficient broadband access. In the 21st century, access to the internet is not a luxury, it’s a necessity.
- Our inland water systems and dams need a fix, as most are nearing or have exceeded their 50-year design life. In Tulsa, our levees almost failed during a flood in 2019. Had they failed, thousands of Oklahomans would have lost their homes and livelihoods.

- Local officials have been asking for years to fix the levees, but it took a near-disaster in order to make it happen. This cannot be the standard moving forward.
- It's irrefutable that our infrastructure needs immediate help. But President Biden's so-called infrastructure plan has little to do with actual infrastructure. Instead, he's using the buzzword "infrastructure" to cover for Green New Deal policies and push it through Congress in a one-sided fight that ignores the root of the problem.

Let's talk about real infrastructure needs:

- In my home district, Tulsa International Airport's Air Traffic Control tower was built in 1968 and fails to meet present-day operational standards. There is a severe need to allocate funding for antiquated air traffic control facilities. The safety of our workers and citizens depends on this project.
- There is also a need to address the state of disrepair that we have allowed to happen to our waterways, including the backlog of critical maintenance on the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System, the much-needed Arkansas River corridor development, and the Tulsa-West-Tulsa Levee Project, which I mentioned earlier.
- Rather than failing to address the ongoing economic fallout of COVID-19 shutdowns, we should be providing targeted assistance to the industries that the government hurt by forcing them to close their doors.
- The transportation industry - including planes, trains, and buses, were among the most damaged. To name an example, we need to provide targeted, not reckless, relief to the aviation industry.
- When planes are grounded, it not only affects the passengers and the airline that sells you your tickets - it affects aviation manufacturing, general aviation and commercial activity.
- As the Member of Congress who represents the maintenance, repair, and operations (MRO) Capital of the World, this has been difficult for the many, many jobs supported by the Aviation industry in my state.
- Many of our problems would be solved if we would simply get out of our own way.
- State DOTs have been central to the implementation of the Federal-Aid Highway Program (FAHP) for over 70 years and continue to be the best partners in developing our National surface transportation system.
- We need flexibility for states to allocate funding to the projects that are most desperately needed. Let's let the folks who drive on these roads every single day decide how to use their own federal dollars.

- We must end restrictions to any State's ability to prioritize funding, such as top-down 'Fix-It-First' mandates. Let's stop playing big brother and give the states what they need to be successful.

In Closing:

- Infrastructure is essential to our everyday lives. A crumbling infrastructure harms every American.
- We all were there on Inauguration Day when President Biden promised unity and healing, but I haven't seen a lick of evidence to back up those flowery statements. Biden has proven that he doesn't care about bipartisanship, he doesn't care about transparency, and he doesn't care about the truth.
- I'm not holding my breath for any bipartisan efforts from this committee either. You'd rather pass as many unpopular policies as you can before you lose the majority next year. I should think the majority would learn from their recent losses and remember that the average American does not support this method of governing.