



Opening Statement
Hearing on Opportunities for Energy Infrastructure
Chairman Lisa Murkowski
March 14, 2017

Good morning, everyone. The committee will come to order.

We are here to discuss infrastructure—specifically, the infrastructure of our energy systems, including our electrical grid. This is our first hearing on infrastructure in this new Congress, but it will not be our last. We are planning to look at lands, water, and resource-related infrastructure next week at this time, and infrastructure will also be a prominent theme at hearings we have planned on our foreign mineral dependence, cyber security, and other issues.

What I hope we can all agree on, through all of these hearings, is that the types of infrastructure within our committee’s jurisdiction are critically important to our country’s growth and prosperity. The United States has some of the most robust and reliable energy infrastructure in the world. It allows us to harness energy and moves it from where it is produced to where it can be utilized. Without it, there would be no fuel when we pull up to the station, and there would be no light when we flip on a switch.

Energy infrastructure is central to our way of life and our standard of living, but it is almost always an afterthought—until it breaks down. We have seen that too often in recent years, making this a perfect time to look at our options to either rebuild, or in many cases build energy infrastructure for the first time.

The reality is, we have our work cut out for us—but that work can be made less difficult, take less time, and cost less money if we engage on real solutions.

Much of our nation’s infrastructure is privately owned and maintained. Upgrading it and building new infrastructure is an expensive and time-consuming process. Hundreds of projects representing billions of dollars of investment are currently navigating the federal labyrinth of permitting – multiple agencies, numerous forms, and duplicative requirements make this process cumbersome and can delay projects for years. Of course, the federal permitting process is also layered on top of state and local permitting processes with little to no apparent coordination, which only adds to the difficulty of “getting to yes.”

I am glad that President Trump has made infrastructure a national priority. I look forward to working with him, his administration as well as other members of the Senate to develop a broad

infrastructure package. And I certainly hope that package will include provisions that streamline the permitting process for all energy infrastructure projects.

The President has already taken some notable first steps, by restoring regulatory fairness for projects like the Keystone XL project. I met with Prime Minister Trudeau last week and he is very pleased that the United States is taking another look at this important project. But there is still a lot more left to do.

Developing and constructing new energy infrastructure projects can help make energy cleaner, cheaper, and more abundant – and it can have a tremendous impact on rural communities. I am delighted that Clay Koplín, the Mayor of Cordova, Alaska and the CEO of Cordova Electric Cooperative, is here with us to discuss how energy development in our home state has transitioned communities away from diesel power, lowered costs, and made energy delivery more affordable. What Mayor Koplín has been able to do over the years with his focus on small hydro has really made a difference, not only for Cordova but also for those communities that look to Cordova as an example.

I also want to point out that when Congress considers an infrastructure package, our committee will in many ways be ahead of the curve on a potential contribution to it. During the development of our bipartisan energy bill, we dedicated a significant amount of time to these challenges. Our members brought forward a number of good ideas to strengthen our energy infrastructure, including streamlining the permitting process for LNG exports, enhancing electricity delivery, and improving the regulatory process for hydropower licensing and relicensing.

I was pleased that we were able to incorporate many of those ideas into a bill that passed the Senate with 85 votes last year—and I'm well aware that they are still available to us, to enact into law in this new Congress.

I like to say that energy is good—you all have heard that. This morning, I would add to it that energy infrastructure is good, and that it belongs in any conversation we have about roads, bridges, and airports. This is an important subject, and I thank our witnesses for being here to discuss it with us.

Senator Cantwell, I'll now turn to you for your opening remarks.

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