

The Honorable John Barrasso, M.D.

Statement for the Record

An Information-Gathering Process on Draft Legislation entitled, America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2020 and The Drinking Water Infrastructure Act of 2020: Stakeholder Comments

April 22, 2020

The Committee on Environment and Public Works initiated this information gathering process on drafts of America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2020 and the Drinking Water Infrastructure Act of 2020 to receive feedback on how the draft bills will benefit the country and how they can be improved.

I look forward to receiving input from stakeholders on these two important draft water infrastructure bills.

Our nation is currently facing its most pressing crisis in decades – the COVID-19 pandemic.

First and foremost is the need to focus our nation's resources to address this serious health threat.

Once we are past the immediate medical and economic crisis, we should turn to restarting America's economic engine.

Congress needs to work in a bipartisan way to help America's economy recover from the crisis.

One of the best ways Congress can help is by investing in America's infrastructure.

This committee has already unanimously advanced bipartisan, comprehensive legislation to fix America's roads and bridges.

America's Transportation Infrastructure Act will make a historic investment in our highways, tunnels, and bridges.

It will reduce red tape and allow states to get funds fast – so people can get back to work.

Along with roads and bridges, our committee is now coming together to address our water infrastructure needs.

Water infrastructure is important to every state, community, and tribe in the country.

These systems support America's economic growth and competitiveness.

They deliver drinking water and treat wastewater.

They provide water for crops, cattle, and small businesses.

They're used to ship American-made goods from the heartland, to the coasts, and around the world.

They keep homes safe from dangerous floodwaters and store water for times of drought.

These systems are vital to our country.

We must maintain, upgrade, and – where necessary - build more of them.

Army Corps of Engineers' projects help generate \$89 billion in net annual economic benefits and generate \$31 billion in revenue for the U.S. Treasury.

Nearly one-third of the United States' gross domestic product comes from international trade, and 99 percent of that trade passes through our nation's ports.

In addition, our ports generate \$378 billion in federal, state, and local tax revenue each year.

That's why Ranking Member Carper and I - along with our fellow leaders on the Committee, Senators Capito and Cardin - drafted America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2020.

The draft bipartisan legislation is the result of input from every member of this committee and the Senate as a whole.

Our draft bill will help grow the economy, cut Washington red tape, and keep communities safe.

The draft of America's Water Infrastructure Act 2020 provides roughly \$17 billion in new federal authorizations for projects across the country.

The draft legislation will help deepen nationally significant ports, and maintain the navigability of inland waterways.

It will increase water storage in the West and build new flood management infrastructure in the Midwest.

This draft will fix aging dams and irrigation systems, and upgrade waste water systems across the country.

The draft authorizes feasibility studies, project modifications, and Army Corps Chief's Reports, all of which make up the foundation of any water resources bill.

The draft bill adjusts the cost-share for the Inland Waterways Trust Fund to allow more inland waterway projects to finally move forward.

Many flood protection projects in cities in the heartland are not funded because their property values are not as high as property values on the coasts.

Our draft creates a new system by which these important projects, including those in rural and disadvantaged areas, can get funded and built.

The draft also contains comprehensive water storage provisions that create a new program to study, construct, or enlarge small water storage projects.

Many states in the West, like Wyoming, want the ability to provide more water for farmers and ranchers for irrigation.

Our draft will help construct smaller reservoir projects and expand existing reservoirs in these states to help our farmers and ranchers.

Many communities need assistance complying with burdensome environmental laws and regulations.

Our draft significantly increases funds for technical assistance and training programs for small, rural, and tribal municipalities.

The draft also contains a number of sections to fight invasive species through financial and technical assistance, research, innovation, and partnerships between the federal government and other entities.

Too often, important water projects are delayed because of drawn-out environmental reviews.

The draft of America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2020 cuts Washington red tape.

It will push the Army Corps to take just two years to complete its feasibility studies for potential projects.

That goal is in line with the standard President Trump has set for federal infrastructure permits.

Construction projects shouldn't harm the environment – but these evaluations shouldn't take years to complete.

Our draft will also allow other federal agencies to review categorical exclusions the Army Corps currently has, and if necessary, create new categorical exclusions.

These exclusions get needed projects started quicker.

We also included important language to help smaller rural communities leverage federal dollars so they can complete needed infrastructure projects.

We waive the cost-share requirements for the Continuing Authorities Programs to make it easier for small and disadvantaged communities to build needed projects to address issues such as flood control, ecosystem restoration and sediment management.

The draft of America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2020 also focuses on safety.

In recent years, we have seen the damage floods and droughts can cause.

We must maintain and improve our dams, levees, and reservoirs.

Our draft takes steps to address the backlog of maintenance needs of these infrastructure systems.

Drinking water infrastructure is also important for our communities and our economy.

That's why Ranking Member Carper and I, along with Subcommittee Chair and Ranking Member Cramer and Duckworth, have put together the draft of the Drinking Water Infrastructure Act of 2020.

The draft bill provides an estimated \$1.25 billion in new federal authorizations to help communities ensure their drinking water is safe.

The draft reauthorizes the Safe Drinking Water Act emergency fund to provide resources and technical assistance to communities facing drinking water emergencies that present a substantial danger to public health.

It also codifies Appropriations language that requires the Drinking Water State Revolving Funds to use 20 percent of their funds on grants, no interest loans, forgiveness of loan principal or to buy, refinance or restructure debt.

State Revolving Funds are one of the main sources of funding for public water systems.

Many struggling systems will never qualify for or be able to repay loans.

The language in the draft bill will give these systems a chance to provide safe and reliable drinking water to their communities.

The draft also makes it simpler for schools and childcare programs to test for lead in their drinking water.

Through these two bipartisan draft infrastructure bills, Environment and Public Works Committee Democrats and Republicans are working together to get our economy moving again.

Ranking Member Carper and I welcome the opportunity for stakeholders to provide input to make these bills even better over the next few weeks.