Prepared Statement of Brendan Bechtel

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Part II

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Introduction

Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse and Members of the Committee:

My name is Brendan Bechtel, and I am the Chairman & Chief Executive Officer of Bechtel. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee in my role as chair of Business Roundtable's Smart Regulation Committee, which leads Business Roundtable's efforts on the critical issue of reforming the federal permitting processes for major infrastructure projects.

Bechtel is one of America's largest engineering and construction firms, delivering projects that make a lasting, meaningful difference for people and communities around the world. Since 1898, Bechtel has completed more than 25,000 projects in 160 countries on all seven continents, including some of the most complex and demanding engineering and construction projects ever built. We are also one of the nation's largest employers of union and non-union craft labor. Over the past two years, Bechtel has hired more than 28,000 skilled craft professionals in the U.S. We have expertise in energy – from liquefied natural gas (LNG) to nuclear power to renewables – as well as environmental cleanup, advanced manufacturing, mining and critical minerals, national defense and security, and core infrastructure.

Business Roundtable is an association of more than 200 chief executive officers (CEOs) of America's leading companies, representing every sector of the U.S. economy. Business Roundtable CEOs lead U.S.-based companies that support one in four American jobs and almost a quarter of U.S. GDP. Through CEO-led policy committees, Business Roundtable members develop and advocate directly for policies to promote a thriving U.S. economy and expanded opportunity for all Americans.

In September 2025, Business Roundtable released "Building a Prosperous Future," a report on the urgent need to modernize America's outdated federal permitting system for major infrastructure projects, which I have submitted with my prepared testimony. It contains recommendations for improving the federal permitting process while maintaining the core principle of protecting the environment. These recommendations were developed over many years, spanning multiple Congresses and both Republican and Democratic administrations. I have advocated for permitting reform with Business Roundtable through three presidential administrations – President Trump's first term, President Biden's term, and now President Trump's second term. This is a topic that has genuine bipartisan support, and the opportunity to enact meaningful reform is before us now.

Permitting reform can tackle rising costs, address critical minerals shortages and supply chain vulnerabilities, alleviate transmission constraints and remove other barriers to American economic success. Critically, an effective permitting process makes America investable – attracting the private capital needed to build the infrastructure our economy and national security depend upon – and competitive in a global economy where other global powers, like China, continue to build critical infrastructure at scale. Just as importantly, it can accelerate large-scale job creation here at home by unlocking investment in energy, manufacturing, construction, and infrastructure projects across the country. Reforms that reduce uncertainty and delays will help employers hire faster and strengthen domestic industries. They enable companies, trade schools, and colleges to invest in training programs and apprenticeships in construction – particularly those requiring next-generation skills – while giving workers confidence that these careers are stable, abundant, and worth pursuing. When projects move forward with clear timelines and outcomes, they engage communities, rebuild public trust, and strengthen America's workforce with good-paying jobs that do not require a four-year degree. The Associated Builders and Contractors estimates that the U.S. will need one million new construction workers by 2027. A steady project pipeline can attract a new generation of workers and expand this critical talent pool.

Congress and the Administration have made meaningful progress on this vital issue, and now is the time to finish the job by enacting bipartisan permitting reform legislation – paving the way for building a more efficient, resilient, and prosperous future.

Congress Has Taken Important Steps to Codify Key Permitting Practices

Over the past decade, Congress has taken significant steps to improve the permitting process, and this Committee has taken a leading role in advancing many of them. Congress has long recognized the need to modernize the permitting process, through bipartisan legislation such as Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act and the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) for surface transportation projects; FAST-41 for certain "covered projects" that voluntarily opt into the process; the Water Resources Development Act for certain water projects; the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which made important changes to FAST-41 and appropriated funds for permitting capacity building at the federal, state and tribal levels; and most recently, the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which incorporated key procedural reform best practices into the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). These reforms have led to better agency coordination, quicker dispute resolution, and shorter timelines for environmental reviews. Yet, more needs to be done.

Additional Improvements Are Needed

Every year of delay holds America back. Bipartisan permitting reform will strengthen U.S. competitiveness by ensuring America can actually build critical infrastructure at the speed and scale already being delivered by other countries.

Bechtel's experience on major infrastructure projects in other countries demonstrates that more efficient and effective permitting processes are achievable.

Consider our recent work on Western Sydney Airport, the first greenfield airport built in Australia in decades. From site designation to final approval, including public comment, subsequent review and revision to the plan, the permitting process took less than three years. We began construction in 2018, after the permits were issued, and completed that project seven months ahead of schedule.

In Canada, Bechtel's 695-megawatt Keeyask hydroelectric project obtained its environmental license in about two and a half years, from the start of the federal study at the end of 2011 to final provincial and federal approvals in mid-2014. Despite the project's complexity and extensive consultation with four Manitoba First Nations who were partners in the development, Canada's review process moved efficiently through public hearings and regulatory approvals.

Contrast these timelines with those in the U.S. Last summer, McKinsey issued a report analyzing the U.S. economic impacts of the permitting process. McKinsey estimated that it takes approximately four to five years for the average investment dollar to go through the federal permitting process[1]. This means that, currently, as much as $1.5 trillion in potential investments are awaiting required federal permits across eight key sectors.

[1] *McKinsey & Company, Unlocking US federal permitting: A sustainable growth imperative (July 28, 2025).*

The opportunity cost is enormous. Major infrastructure projects are stalled in the permitting queue, and McKinsey estimates the unrealized returns at $100–$140 billion per year. Americans also aren't seeing the economic benefits these investments would generate – the jobs, spending, and growth that would ripple through the economy if projects were approved and built. According to McKinsey, the unrealized induced GDP impact is roughly $1.7–$2.4 trillion.

The opportunity cost for litigation reform is also compelling. McKinsey reports 28% of major projects that receive federal permits are litigated, adding an average of 4.2 years of delay, and notes that while agencies prevail in 80% of these cases, litigation still imposes significant costs including delayed jobs, increased construction costs and overhead, and wasted taxpayer or private-sector dollars. These challenges are becoming more frequent. It is reported that between 2013 and 2022, circuit courts heard approximately 39 NEPA appeals cases per year, a 56% increase compared to the 2001–2015 period.

What's more, while the U.S. waits, other countries move ahead and capture market share. Nations with more predictable permitting systems are advancing large-scale infrastructure projects faster – particularly in strategic sectors that will define the future like nuclear energy, semiconductor manufacturing, and AI infrastructure.

Strong environmental protections and efficient permitting are not in conflict. Business Roundtable's "Building a Prosperous Future" report contains detailed policy recommendations for reforms that would help break the logjam and unleash investment, innovation, and job creation across every sector, while continuing to ensure thorough and responsible environmental reviews. Here are five that Business Roundtable believes would have **the greatest impact if enacted**:

1. Congress should **amend NEPA to limit reviews to environmental impacts not already within another federal agency's direct regulatory jurisdiction**. This would eliminate needless redundancy and focus environmental reviews on impacts not otherwise subject to review. This reform would build upon the Supreme Court's recent May 2025 decision in *Seven County Infrastructure Coalition v. Eagle County, Colorado*, which limited Environmental Impact Statement reviews to potential effects directly related to the project and within the agency's jurisdiction to address. Codifying these principles into NEPA would be a valuable and logical next step.
2. Congress should also **improve the litigation process for alleged NEPA violations**. We recommend shortening the statute of limitations from six years under the Administrative Procedure Act to 150 days after a final permitting decision. Additionally, once an agency completes the NEPA process and issues a permit, petitioners should not be allowed to invoke NEPA as grounds for injunction or vacating an agency decision. Lastly, standing to bring suits should be limited to parties that participated in the NEPA process.
3. Congress should further reduce redundancy and make reviews more efficient by directing agencies to **utilize nationwide permits, programmatic EISs, categorical exclusions and "permits by rule" to the maximum extent permitted by law**.
4. Congress should reaffirm and codify the authority for the Army Corps of Engineers **Nationwide Permit program for linear infrastructure** and direct the Corps to preserve longstanding practices under this program.
5. Congress should **require agencies to utilize state data where states have primary regulatory authority** over a project, thereby reducing or eliminating redundant review and consultation. State, local and federal agencies are requiring the same data and analyses. We can do a better job reducing this redundancy without sacrificing environmental stewardship.

Conclusion

We are encouraged by the meaningful progress being made on a bipartisan basis to address the urgent need for an improved federal permitting process. The President has made permitting reform a top priority for this Administration and taken bold steps to advance it. Meanwhile, several constructive improvements have already garnered bipartisan support in Congress, demonstrating shared recognition across the aisle that action is urgently needed. This includes recent legislation passed by the House. **Business Roundtable looks forward to working with Senators on legislation to create a permitting system that is efficient, follows a predictable process, and yields a durable result**. This is our opportunity to reassert American industrial leadership, unlock investment, and harness the ingenuity that built this country over the past 250 years – ensuring we continue to lead for the next 250. Thank you.