

**Opening Statement
Ranking Member Stacey Plaskett**

**Hearing on “An Examination of Federal Permitting Processes”
Subcommittee on the Interior, Energy, and Environment**

March 15, 2018

Thank you Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing.

We can all agree that environmental protection should go hand in hand with economic development. The Virgin Islands, which I am proud to represent, is a beautiful place that thrives on tourism, and understands more than most places the importance of striking the balance between environmental regulations and development.

According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, our nation faces an infrastructure investment deficit of \$2 trillion.

For instance, they estimated \$1 trillion is needed to fix America’s drinking water infrastructure.

Our nation’s transit system has a backlog of projects to attain a state of good repair that will cost \$90 billion and is projected to grow to \$122 billion.

America’s public school system needs \$58 billion to maintain and operate current facilities and an additional \$77 billion to upgrade the current school facilities to reduce the maintenance backlog. In the Virgin Islands, the public schools are forced to run on four-hour rotations because of the destruction to school facilities during the recent hurricane season. This is expected to continue at least through the next school year until new facilities can be constructed.

Finally, America’s roads and bridges are in need of \$836 billion to repair a system that has been underfunded for years.

Unfortunately, President Trump’s infrastructure proposal aggravates the infrastructure deficit.

The Trump plan would cut more than \$168 billion from Federal highway, Amtrak, and water infrastructure funding over 10 years.

President Trump also proposed retreating from the federal government's lead role in financing infrastructure. The federal government historically funded 80% of highways and 20% would be funded locally. President Trump's plan reverses the percentages and requires states to contribute 80% of project costs in order to receive a 20% match from the federal government. State officials know that requiring an 80% local cost share for any eligible project is going to put most (if not all) projects out of reach. In the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, it makes them basically out of the question.

The Trump plan is little more than a wish list. It wishes that state and local governments and private investors will make up for reduced federal investment in infrastructure.

But we don't have the luxury of magical thinking. The consequences of inadequate infrastructure investment hit every American in the pocketbook.

The Civil Engineers determined that inadequate infrastructure costs every American family \$3,400 a year.

Isn't it time that we face up to the fact that we cannot avoid the cost of investing in our infrastructure? The bill is long past due.

There is also much progress to be made on permitting for infrastructure. In the Virgin Islands, where the cost of living is 33 percent higher than even the District of Columbia's, every dollar in the local economy is crucial to the survival of the islands, and we cannot afford drawn-out delays in permitting for economic development projects. But there are ways to speed up projects that will not lead to environmental damage.

Permitting agencies should have enough funding to complete reviews quickly, and coordination tools already available that should be fully implemented. The most common factor delaying water and transportation projects is inadequate funding, and so long-term federal support and program certainty should be a much higher priority.

I thank our witnesses for sharing their testimony today, and I look forward to this important discussion.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Contact: Jennifer Hoffman, Communications Director, (202) 226-5181.