

## T&I Member Day remarks

Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

Thank you for hosting “Member Day” for your colleagues like me who have important requests for the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

I’m here to highlight a few problems that affect my district and the country as a whole, including ongoing sewage spills along the U.S.-Mexico coastal border; disaster preparedness and resiliency; and issues of public transportation, density, and housing.

First, we have the issue of cross border pollution. Since at least 1944, the federal government has tried, and failed, to stop flows of treated and untreated sewage in the US from the Tijuana river in Mexico. It has not been for lack of trying. I want to thank the Committee for its past efforts in 2000, 2004, and a hearing in 2007 to address the problem. However, we are still dealing with the problem, now at unprecedented levels – over 143 million gallons of raw sewage was discharged in a matter of weeks in February of 2017. Mexico’s sewer system infrastructure in Mexico cannot keep pace with Tijuana’s fast-growing population, and until it does, we will keep experiencing these spills.

Just this week, I signed on to a letter with the San Diego delegation and Senator Harris and Feinstein, urging the IBWC, EPA, the Army, Secretary of State and Customs and Border Protection to coordinate their efforts to find a permanent solution that address the root causes of both immediate

and long-term pollution issues along the border. The rupture of the Collector Poniente, in southeast Tijuana on December 10th 2018, is only the most recent example. At the time of the break, it was leaking roughly seven million gallons per day. Yet we don't know the current status of repairs. This is just one example of many urgent problems we must fix.

But we must ensure that all relevant agencies are working together towards a comprehensive regional solution. Advances in water resource technology allow us to think about wastewater as a commodity; we can use it to generate renewable energy, fertilizers, and other valuable byproducts. As you know, BWIP is unique among federal funding programs because it's the only federal program that can fund projects on both sides of the border. Since the program began in 1997, it has provided hundreds of thousands of U.S. households along the border with adequate drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. BWIP was initially funded with \$100 million per year, however it has been reduced over the last 20 years to less than \$10 million. We need to make substantial investments in projects along the US-Mexico border – investments commensurate with the seriousness of the problem.

The San Diego delegation stands ready to work with you, and welcome your ideas and suggestions to finally eliminate the transboundary sewage pollution problem.

A second pressing issue for my district and the country is natural disasters, particularly wildfires, as they have become more common as climate change wreaks havoc on the environment. I have introduced two bills under

this Committee's jurisdiction to help communities prepare for future natural disasters.

Earlier this year, I re-introduced the bipartisan "Strengthening the Resiliency of Our Nation on the Ground Act" or the STRONG Act, with Congresswoman Elise Stefanik.

The STRONG Act would do this by establishing a central agency and information center to combine the expertise of local, state, and federal agencies in developing short- and long-term resiliency strategies for communities.

We know that for every dollar invested in preparedness and resiliency, six dollars are saved in restoration following a disaster. This bill will give communities the tools to plan ahead and increase their resiliency, which will save lives and reduce costs in the long run.

I also introduced the DISASTER Act with my colleague, Congressman Mark Meadows. This bipartisan bill would require the OMB to use data it already has to produce an annual report quantifying the disaster-related assistance provided by the federal government each year.

Currently, the government does not produce a single estimate of how much we spend on disaster-related assistance. This bill will make sure our constituents know how tax dollars are spent on disaster relief.

Finally, I would like to stress the importance of investing in public transportation that prioritizes decongesting our roads, increases sustainability, and supports regional housing planning.

I urge the Committee to continue to improve transit infrastructure to encourage more commuters to take public transportation and reduce vehicle miles traveled. Since the federal government can only support a limited number of projects, I would encourage prioritizing projects that will connect or improve service in densely populated areas to minimize greenhouse gas emissions.

Along the same vein, the federal government needs to coordinate with local and state governments to ensure federal transit investments are met with a commitment to increase density and build housing along transit corridors. Large and small cities across the country struggle to build enough housing and keep rents affordable for families.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these matters. I look forward to continuing to work with you on these and other issues.