

United States Senator Tim Johnson

Opening Statement

Full Committee Hearing on the Condition of our Nation's Infrastructure and Proposals for
Needed Improvements

September 21, 2010

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today regarding the need to invest in our nation's infrastructure. I commend your focus on infrastructure as an investment in jobs and our economy. I am also pleased that President Obama has focused national attention on strengthening our transportation systems and other infrastructure to ensure long-term economic growth and competitiveness.

This hearing examines an important topic. Throughout my congressional career, I have worked to improve South Dakota's highways and transit systems, water systems and stock of affordable housing. Infrastructure investments are needed across the state—in Indian Country, in our rural areas, and in our cities—and those investments are in the national interest.

Mr. Chairman, in the 110th Congress you introduced legislation to address infrastructure concerns in housing, water, and transportation. This Committee held a hearing on the legislation in March of 2008.

I'd like to reiterate an issue I raised in my statement at that hearing. Specifically, I want to ensure that we take rural as well as urban concerns into account in examining investment needs and developing any response. For example, in my state we have important needs but relatively few projects that would involve a minimum \$75 million Federal commitment, a minimum threshold that has been suggested in the past. Also of concern are project criteria that emphasize leveraging. In low population density states, the ability to provide meaningful financial leverage and to attract outside investors may be quite limited. Small numbers of people not doing especially well economically are not as well equipped to contribute to projects as large numbers of workers in large metro areas. This is especially a concern in Indian Country and in other poor rural areas. The citizens in these less populated states still have important needs in housing, in water systems, in transportation that should be of concern to this committee.

So, as we examine the issues of infrastructure needs and possible responses, I hope that any solutions we develop would provide meaningful opportunities for investment in states like South Dakota, as well as in more populous areas of the country.

Mr. Chairman, thanks for your efforts on this issue. I look forward to working with you.