



County Commissioners

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**Testimony Before the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban
Affairs
in a hearing entitled
*Investing in Rural Communities 21st Century Communities: Local Leaders on
the Infrastructure Needs Facing America's States, Cities, and Towns***

**Josh Parsons
Chairman, Board of County Commissioners, Lancaster County,
Pennsylvania
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Thank you Chairman Brown, Ranking Member Toomey, and the other members of the Committee.

My name is Josh Parsons and I am Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. I am a former prosecutor and a former Army Infantry Officer.

The Board of County Commissioners is the seat of legislative and executive powers in the county and has broad authority over the county's budget and finances, taxes, debts, and contracts.

At around 550,000 citizens, Lancaster County is the 6th most populous of Pennsylvania's 67 counties. Although best known for our Amish and Mennonite communities, like Pennsylvania itself, we are a diverse community with urban, suburban, and rural residents. Lancaster County is made up of 60 municipalities – 1 City, 18 Boroughs, and 41 Townships.

We pride ourselves on fiscal restraint and responsibility.

Lancaster County Government has approximately the highest general fund balance (like a personal savings account for an individual) that it has had ever. This was achieved through conservative budget management, not raising taxes. Lancaster County's current Board of Commissioners has never raised taxes. In fact, our county taxes have not been raised in nearly a decade, which is difficult to do as a county in Pennsylvania.



Lancaster County has the 3rd lowest tax rate of the 67 counties in Pennsylvania and the lowest of any large county. Our bond rating has been rising and we have been good stewards of our infrastructure. We are steadily working through a plan to repair or replace all of our structurally deficient bridges.

Like everywhere else, the last year and a half has been a challenge for Lancaster County. We went into COVID with the best economy we had seen in a generation. Our businesses were thriving and wages were rising for all groups and demographics.

The impact of the pandemic, and our Governor's ensuing draconian lockdowns and refusal to address the economic damage of the pandemic, did great harm to our economy.

However, I am very proud of our County's response to COVID. Our County favored a middle course - we addressed COVID and the economic crisis. We pulled together as a community and executed what in many ways was a model medical and economic recovery plan in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The Federal CARES Act resources were instrumental in our recovery. Lancaster County received approximately \$95 million. This was a huge amount of money for us. These funds were disbursed to us very rapidly after passage of the bill and arrived during the crisis. We in turn put the money quickly to use for both our medical and economic recovery plans across our county. The CARES Act had sufficient flexibility in the Treasury guidance that counties were able to use it in varied and necessary ways.

As fiscal conservatives, we were, of course, concerned about the cost of the CARES Act and the debt being accrued at the national level to pay for it. But we recognized it was a necessary response to the crisis because the government had effectively shut down the economy and prevented people from earning a living. We felt a heavy responsibility to use the money wisely to help our community.

Unlike the CARES Act, I do not think the so-called American Rescue Plan was necessary. Under this Act Lancaster County is slated to receive about \$106 million. Again, this is a huge amount of money for us. Moreover, every other county in Pennsylvania, and many other municipalities, are receiving allocations.

This money is arriving after the COVID crisis is over. And now come proposals for even more money to be sent out through an infrastructure plan.

At this point, rather than sending out more money, the better solution would be to get government fully out of the way and let the economy come roaring back.

As I talk to people around my county, what I hear about is concern about costs going up. Groceries, gas, lumber – everything costs more.

Inflation is a natural and predictable result of huge amounts of money being pumped into the economy. Numbers from May show inflation is up 5%. All this new money is chasing the same amount of goods and services, including here in Lancaster County.

Inflation hurts working class people in Lancaster County the worst because rising prices for things like groceries and gas outpace wages. You can see and feel this happening already around us. It also eats away at the value of any money put away in a bank account for a rainy day.

So, I would fervently ask that before you consider borrowing more money from our grandchildren to hand out across the country – just stop and take a pause. There is a huge amount of money already circulating. For example, if you want to provide for infrastructure Congress could allow more flexibility for counties, and other municipalities, in the use of the existing American Rescue Plan funds. What need there still is could then be addressed in a much more targeted way.

Please do not further bankrupt our country and take from our yet unborn grandchildren without first waiting to use the existing massive amounts of money that have already been distributed to states and local governments.

Thank you.