



**Opening Statement**  
**Full Committee Hearing on Infrastructure Permitting**  
**Chairman Lisa Murkowski**  
**December 12, 2017**

Good morning, everyone. The Committee will come to order.

We're here today to discuss infrastructure permitting challenges, ongoing efforts to streamline federal approvals, and opportunities to improve the responsiveness, the transparency, and the predictability of our system of permit review.

I think we all recognize the need to make investments that will upgrade and modernize our infrastructure. We have had hearings in this Committee, many hearings, to look specifically at the needs in the energy and resource sectors. But as we continue to discuss energy infrastructure, it is important that we take steps to rationalize how projects are reviewed and approved.

The existing regulatory regime impacts the cost effectiveness of our federal infrastructure spending. Beyond that, the length and uncertainty associated with the permitting process limits the willingness of the private sector to finance, build, and operate energy infrastructure—this drives dollars overseas, rather than into jobs and growth and prosperity for our nation.

So whether we're talking about a pipeline, a mine, a power plant, a public-private partnership for a water system or a company building a factory, we know that the deployment of capital is too often delayed—sometimes by years, and sometimes deliberately. When investment is impeded, how can we expect capital to be deployed here – where an environmental impact statement alone averages almost five years and final approval can take a decade or more – we look to other countries, for example Canada and Germany, they are moving similar projects in just a couple years,

I look forward to hearing from federal witnesses who are working to make our system work better, and hearing about how the permitting reforms of FAST-41, which we enacted roughly two years ago, and how those are being implemented.

I am also pleased to have three non-federal witnesses who have experience – they might say too long an experience – navigating the federal permitting gauntlet for electric transmission, hydropower, and mining projects.

New and upgraded transmission lines are crucial to a reliable and secure electric grid and to bring new sources of energy to our markets. Despite that, the number of federal, state, and local agencies involved in a single project makes permitting notoriously cumbersome.

We have also talked at length in this committee about the challenges of licensing and relicensing hydro facilities. When I tell people about the time involved in a relicense it's almost breathtaking. The need to fix the FERC process before the number of projects up for relicensing increases dramatically over the coming decade.

Finally, when it comes to permitting delays for new mines, our nation is among the worst in the world and it is leading us to be dependent on foreign nations for the fundamental building blocks of a wide range of energy, defense, health care, and other modern technologies.

The Energy and Natural Resources Act that Senator Cantwell and I reintroduced this year has provisions that take important steps to streamline project reviews in all three of these industries. That is an important bill that will help us make needed progress. But we also recognize that the challenges we will hear about today represent a subset of the infrastructure sectors that are also struggling to permit projects. Whether its energy production, pipelines, pumped storage, water supply, LNG, or something else, our system needs to be improved across the board.

We absolutely have the ability to establish a permitting process that works – one that protects the environment and promotes state and local input, while not miring projects in red tape and driving away private investment. To achieve that goal, we have to set aside the misguided idea that accelerating or coordinating approvals somehow weakens protections – or that simply spending more money will fix all the problems. It doesn't, we know that, and it won't work – both common sense and experience tell us that we can maintain our high standards while speeding reviews and approvals.

So I view this hearing as the next step in our effort to improve our nation's infrastructure, and look forward to the insights and ideas from our witnesses to do just that. Again, thank you all for being with us this morning.

Senator Cantwell, I welcome your comments this morning.

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