

Questions for the Record

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

“Nominations of Victoria Marie Baecher Wassmer, to be Chief Financial Officer for the Department of Transportation (DOT); Mohsin Raza Syed, to be Assistant Secretary of Government Affairs at DOT; Amitabha Bose, to be Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration; and Meera Joshi, to be Administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration”

10:00 AM, September 22, 2021

Questions for the Record from Hon. SINEMA to MOHSIN SYED

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provides a significant investment of 550 billion additional dollars over five years in America’s transportation infrastructure.

Question 1. Should the IIJA become law, how would its investments revitalize America’s transportation infrastructure?

Answer: The IIJA provides \$550 billion in new federal investment in America’s infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and mass transit, water infrastructure, resilience, and broadband. The Biden-Harris administration believes that we must invest in our country and in our people by creating good-paying union jobs, tackling the climate crisis, and growing the economy sustainably and equitably for decades to come. This bipartisan legislation will deliver progress towards these objectives for our Nation’s transportation infrastructure and for working families across the country. Among other investments, IIJA makes the largest federal investment in public transit ever; makes the largest federal investment in passenger rail since the creation of Amtrak; makes the single largest dedicated bridge investment since the construction of the interstate highway system; and helps us tackle the climate crisis by making the largest investment in clean energy transmission and EV infrastructure in history, including electrifying thousands of school and transit buses across the country.

Question 2. If confirmed and the IIJA becomes law, how will you ensure the Department of Transportation (DOT) meets deadlines set forth in the IIJA? How will you keep state, local, and tribal governments updated on implementation of the IIJA?

Answer: The IIJA is a generational investment in America’s infrastructure. It will help ensure our Nation has the safest, most equitable, reliable, and modern transportation system in the world, and will increase economic strength, improve climate outcomes, and build global competitiveness for the American people. While the Department is well-positioned to implement the bill, it will need extraordinary, fast, and coordinated work to be successful. Implementing the IIJA will require a cross-functional and cross-modal effort that is sustained, disciplined, and inclusive. The Department will not only need to continue to operate with the highest degree of integrity and accountability but also set a

new standard for future investments. DOT will also coordinate outreach to stakeholders and external partners. This will include robust engagement and clear lines of communication with state and local governments and Tribal Nations, especially to communities that have been historically underserved. Whether it is in IIJA implementation or any other transportation-related matter, my team will always strive to keep a variety of regular forums for communicating with state, local, and Tribal communities of all sizes and provide personal, tailored responses.

Tribal Consultation. Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized Native American tribes. We were also pleased to see President Biden select Arizona native Arlando Teller as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Tribal Affairs at the DOT.

Question 3. How will you work with Deputy Assistant Secretary Teller and Arizona's 22 federally recognized tribes to ensure Arizona's tribes receive consultation and have their input heard when the Department assesses tribal transportation needs?

Answer: It is an honor and privilege for me to work with my colleague Arlando Teller, Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for Tribal Affairs. On January 26, 2021, President Biden issued a Presidential Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships. DAS Teller and I designated Milo Booth, Director of Tribal Affairs, as the agency official responsible for the Department's Tribal Consultation efforts. Both DAS Teller and Director Booth will continue to reach out directly with the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona to ensure their voices are heard. Additionally, I would like to note that DAS Teller moderated a Tribal roundtable with Secretary Buttigieg and the twenty-two tribes of Arizona and the Navajo Nation on July 15, 2021, in Phoenix. Each Tribe was able to engage both the Secretary and DAS Teller directly.

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Governmental Affairs – thanks to the hard work of DAS Teller, Director Booth, and others on the team – handle all specific Tribal Consultation requests on behalf of the Secretary. DAS Teller and his team will continue to have my full support as they engage our Tribal partner via Tribal consultation.

Questions for the Record from Senator Warnock to Mohsin Raza Syed

Intergovernmental Outreach. Mr. Syed, since being elected Senator for Georgia earlier this year, I have heard from communities across Georgia – from small towns and rural counties to mid-sized cities and large metropolitan areas – about the difficulties they face in funding local infrastructure projects. Many local governments are unaware of all the opportunities and grant programs offered by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) or don't know how to engage with these programs. I am appreciative of initiatives like Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success (ROUTES), but I believe more can be done to engage and educate rural and urban stakeholders who haven't directly engaged with federal transportation programs in the past.

Question 1: If confirmed, how can your team help ensure that communities big and small are aware of all the funding and educational resources provided by DOT – especially if the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* is enacted? I am particularly interested in outreach and engagement with local governments and regions that have been historically underserved.

Answer: You have my firm commitment that the intergovernmental affairs work of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Governmental Affairs will continue to be a major priority for me and for the Department of Transportation as a whole. Thanks to the hard work of Charles Small, Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for Intergovernmental Affairs, our intergovernmental affairs team has been thoroughly focused on ensuring that the tools and institutional knowledge at the Department is available to state and local governments in real time – especially to communities that have been historically underserved.

I can further assure you that sustained outreach and engagement with state and local governments and Tribal Nations is of critical importance to the Secretary. This will be even more true should the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) become law – leading to a historically large investment in America's infrastructure. The goals of the Administration to center equity in these investments will be directly driven by local coordination on implementing these new resources. Robust engagement with state and local governments and Tribal Nations will continue to remain a top priority for the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Governmental Affairs.

Question 2: Do you believe DOT, and your office in particular, has a role in helping to match needs with opportunities and helping communities without federal affairs specialists navigate the complex grantmaking process? If so, could you expound on that responsibility and any related goals?

Answer: I do believe the Department is responsible for helping communities navigate the grantmaking process, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Governmental Affairs in particular intends to continue playing a leading role in stewarding this responsibility because the work of state and local government and Tribal leaders outside of Washington is absolutely critical in realizing the investments the Biden-Harris Administration hopes to make for improving and maintaining access to safe, reliable transportation. The heart

of this work is clear and regular lines of communication, both outward by updating communities on key actions and deadlines on a consistent basis, and inward by always having an open door with reliable reaction time for utilizing the Department's resources in answering questions and solving problems on an individual basis.

As a former mayor, Secretary Buttigieg has affirmed how important it is to foster a more accessible and user-friendly DOT – not just for states and major cities, but for small municipalities, county officials, and for Tribal Nations. You have my commitment that whether it is in IIJA implementation or any other transportation-related matter, my team will always strive to keep a variety of regular forums for communicating with state, local, and Tribal communities of all sizes and provide personal, tailored responses.