BLUEGREEN ALLIANCE

CREATING GOOD JOBS, A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT, AND A FAIR AND THRIVING ECONOMY

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

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Thank you Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member Walden, and distinguished members of the committee. My name is Jessica Eckdish, and I am the Legislative Director of the BlueGreen Alliance. On behalf of my organization, our partners, and the millions of members and supporters they represent, I want to thank you for convening this hearing today.

The BlueGreen Alliance unites America's largest labor unions and its most influential environmental organizations to solve today's environmental challenges in ways that create and maintain quality jobs and build a stronger, fairer economy. Our partnership is firm in its belief that Americans don't have to choose between a good job and a clean environment—we can and must have both.

Investing in repairing and modernizing our nation's infrastructure—the topic of today's hearing—is a clear example of this principle. If done right, a federal infrastructure package will boost our economy and create millions of jobs, while simultaneously reducing pollution, combating climate change, and strengthening our communities.

American infrastructure systems today are in dire need of repair and modernization. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)'s latest *2017 Report Card for America's Infrastructure* gave the nation's infrastructure a grade of "D+."[i] This is not just a grade on paper, it means real threats to our communities, from failing bridges and contaminated drinking water to inefficient and unhealthy schools, power outages, and dangerous and leaky gas pipes under our cities.

These problems are only getting worse. The 2017 historic hurricane season laid waste to Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Texas, and Florida, in some areas destroying critical infrastructure systems, plunging millions of Americans into darkness, and further aggravating an already desperate need for safe water.[ii]

The world's climate continues to change, and the deteriorating state of our infrastructure creates a vicious circle. As our systems crumble and become more inefficient, the excess pollution exacerbates climate change. And as our climate changes, more extreme weather—floods, stronger storms, droughts, and other impacts—test our already strained infrastructure systems, endangering the health and safety of our communities.

It is past time for Congress to move forward a plan to meet this challenge. BlueGreen Alliance research has found that investing an estimated $2.2 trillion in a variety of infrastructure sectors to improve them from a "D+" grade overall to a "B" grade has the potential to support or create an additional 14.5 million job-years across the U.S. economy, add a cumulative $1.66 trillion to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over 10 years, and reduce greenhouse gas and toxic chemical pollution—versus a business-as-usual approach.[iii]

Last week, we released a set of fourteen infrastructure policy priorities in key sectors, including energy transmission, distribution and storage, transportation, water, schools and other buildings, broadband, natural infrastructure and climate resilience, and manufacturing.[iv] Our full list of priorities is included as an attachment with this testimony.

Making these smart investments has the potential to deliver millions of good jobs. They will also pay dividends for our environment and communities by reducing air and water pollution—including the emissions driving climate change—reducing the use of materials and chemicals that are hazardous to human health, and making our communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

However, we will accrue these benefits only if we tackle this challenge the right

way. To ensure we maximize the benefits of our infrastructure investments for communities, the environment, and workers, any federal infrastructure package must deliver in five key ways:

1) Create Good-Paying Jobs

First, any infrastructure package must create good-paying jobs. The people who build and rebuild our infrastructure projects should be well-trained, make a decent living, and work in a safe environment. This means enforcing Davis-Bacon provisions that ensure workers are paid prevailing wages. It means utilizing project labor agreements (PLAs), community benefit agreements, local hire, and other provisions and practices that improve training, working conditions, and project benefits. These requirements and benefits should extend across infrastructure projects and to manufacturing of infrastructure related equipment and technology.

Investing in infrastructure not only creates jobs at projects themselves, but can lead a revival in the U.S. manufacturing sector, with the expansion of good job opportunities at all levels of the domestic supply chain, and increased cost savings and competitiveness among manufacturers that reduce their energy waste through energy efficiency. Effective procurement policies—both long standing measures, and new, innovative approaches—can help infrastructure projects achieve these objectives.

First and foremost, any infrastructure package must ensure all projects built with public resources are subject to Buy America and Buy American standards that maximize the return to taxpayers and bolster American manufacturing. It must also include respect for collective bargaining agreements and workers' organizing rights such as neutrality, majority sign-up, and first contract arbitration. Lastly, it means maintaining and growing jobs in the public sector necessary to effectively maintain and operate assets, ensure project quality, protect worker and environmental safety and health, and deliver continued cost-effective operation in the public interest.

2) Deliver Climate Benefits and Reduce Pollution

Second, an infrastructure package must deliver climate benefits and reduce pollution. Targeted investments could deliver significant greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Take drinking water investments: 6 billion gallons of clean water is leaked daily from public drinking water systems—enough for 15 million households—which has significant associated greenhouse gas (GHG) impacts.[v] A 5 percent reduction in leaks reduces climate change pollution by an equivalent of 225,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide.[vi] Similarly, full implementation of a nationwide smart grid could reduce U.S. carbon dioxide emissions by 12 percent, equal to preventing 442 million metric tons of carbon emissions from entering the atmosphere each year.[vii]

A range of other investments—from expanding natural infrastructure, to making our public buildings more energy efficient, to repairing and replacing aging gas distribution pipes—could all significantly reduce climate pollution, as well as air and water pollution. Ensuring that we "Buy Clean" and prioritize use of the most efficient, resilient, and cleanest materials and products with the lowest carbon and toxicity footprints can also significantly reduce emissions while rewarding manufacturing companies that invest in reducing their carbon footprints.

Any infrastructure package should also follow processes that ensure effective environmental review and public participation in infrastructure decisions while also prioritizing the resources needed to ensure these projects move forward quickly and deliver benefits to communities and workers quickly.

3) Increase Community Resilience

Third, this package must make our infrastructure and communities more resilient. This means driving forward-looking planning and investments that build for the future, not the past, and that make our infrastructure systems and communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change, like extreme weather events and rising sea level. It means prioritizing investments in natural infrastructure solutions, like restoring the nation's forests, wetlands,

floodplains, grasslands, and coastlines—all of which make communities safer and serve as carbon sinks. It also includes building efficient, safe, and connected schools, hospitals, and public buildings that provide critical community services daily and in extreme weather.

Building infrastructure with future conditions in mind is also smarter and more cost-effective than rebuilding systems that have proven to be vulnerable. Strategic investments in climate-resilient infrastructure—and a workforce that is well trained to ensure the work is done right to maximize the efficiency benefits and build in climate resilience, as well as trained to aid in emergency response—can make sure that our communities are prepared for these impacts and come out stronger, more sustainable, and more resilient to meet the challenges of the next century.

4) Maximize Benefits to Workers and Communities

Fourth, an infrastructure package must maximize benefits to workers and communities—especially those most in need. This can be done by enhancing workforce training and registered apprenticeship programs to expand the number of skilled workers in new and existing industries and in the public sector. It means enhancing and enforcing hiring and procurement policies that spur local job creation and benefit low-income communities, people of color, and women. It means prioritizing investments in communities impacted by historic inequities, disinvestment, and deindustrialization. Policies like these can help ensure our infrastructure investments provide economic opportunities for communities and local workers across the United States.

5) Ensure Robust, Public Investment

Finally, any infrastructure package must begin with a robust, public investment and tackle the broad array of our infrastructure needs—from repairing our failing roads and bridges, water systems, and natural gas distribution pipelines, to modernizing our schools, buildings and electric grid, and transforming our transportation systems.

Public investment in infrastructure is flagging. As a share of GDP, public expenditures on infrastructure spiked toward the end of the recession due both to shrinking GDP and investment funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.[viii] As a result, our overall infrastructure grade remained consistent with the 2013 grade—sadly only a "D+"[ix]—but more recently, transportation and water infrastructure investment at the federal level has fallen to the lowest levels since the 1970s as a share of GDP.[x] Our need has not stopped growing, however. The gap between planned infrastructure expenditures and the amount of funding needed to bring it to an overall "B" grade has risen to more than $2 trillion dollars, up from $1.6 trillion in 2014.[xi]

The longer we wait to repair these basic systems, the more it will cost in the long run in terms of investment needed, interest accrued, and other factors. If these investments were accomplished under the present form of government expenditure and at today's interest rates of roughly 3 percent—versus the pre-recession rate of 4.5 percent—taxpayers would save nearly $1 trillion dollars over 30 years financing the $2 trillion in additional funding needed to close the gap necessary to achieving an overall "B" grade.[xii]

ASCE estimates the economic cost of allowing the gap to perpetuate would be approximately $3.9 trillion lost GDP and 2.5 million lost jobs through 2025.[xiii]It is critical that any federal infrastructure package delivers robust, direct public spending and it's in America's best interest to fix our infrastructure sooner rather than later.

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The LIFT America Act embodies these five principles and takes a significant step towards addressing our country's infrastructure challenge. We are particularly pleased to see efforts included in the bill to create or expand programs and increase funding for drinking water infrastructure, electric grid resiliency and modernization, building energy efficiency—including schools—reducing methane emissions from natural gas distribution pipelines, expanding broadband access, and brownfield redevelopment. While the bill also includes

necessary conditions to ensure domestic content, prevailing wage, and other benefits for workers and communities, there are opportunities to expand these provisions across the bill. We look forward to working with the committee and identifying opportunities to strengthen and advance this important effort moving forward.

Repairing America's infrastructure systems is both urgently needed and an enormous opportunity; it should be a bipartisan legislative priority in the 116th Congress.

In closing, I want to reiterate that tackling the crisis of our aging infrastructure—if done right—is a significant opportunity to increase U.S. global competitiveness, create quality, family-sustaining jobs across the country, significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other pollution, and make our children healthier and our communities more more resilient.

We look forward to working with this Committee as you move forward your infrastructure agenda for the 116th Congress. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

Endnotes

[i] American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), *2017 Infrastructure Report Card*. Available online:
[ii] National Geographic, "2017 Hurricane Season Was the Most Expensive in U.S. History," November 30, 2017. Available online: https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/11/2017-hurricane-season-most-expensive-us-history-spd/
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[iv] BlueGreen Alliance, *Investing in America's Infrastructure to Create High-Quality Jobs and Protect the Environment*, May 15, 2019. Available online: https://www.bluegreenalliance.org/resources/investing-in-americas-infrastructure-to-create-high-quality-jobs-and-protect-the-environment/
[v] ASCE, Infrastructure Report Card: Drinking Water, 2017. Available online: https://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Drinking-Water-Final.pdf
[vi] Chicago State University, The Carbon Footprint of Water, 2009. Available online: http:// www.csu.edu/cerc/researchreports/documents/CarbonFootprintofWater-RiverNetwork-2009.pdf
[vii] Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, "Smart grid could reduce emissions by 12percent," 2010. Available online: http://www.pnnl.gov/news/release.aspx?id=776
[viii] Congressional Budget Office, "Public Spending on Transportation and Water Infrastructure, 1956 to 2017," October 2018. Available online: https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2018-10/54539-Infrastructure.pdf
[ix] ASCE, *2017 Infrastructure Report Card*. Available online: https://www.infrastructurereportcard.org
[x] Ibid.
[xi] BlueGreen Alliance, *Making the Grade 2.0: Investing in America's Infrastructure to Create Quality Jobs and Protect the Environment*, September 7, 2017. Available online: https://www.bluegreenalliance.org/resources/making-the-grade-2-0-investing-in-americas-infrastructure-to-create-quality-jobs-and-protect-the-environment/
[xii] Ibid.
[xiii] ASCE, "Economic Impact", 2017. Available online:http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/the-impact/economic-impact/