

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF

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STATE OF OKLAHOMA
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION**

before the

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
JUDICIARY COMMITTEE**

Task Force on Executive Overreach

hearing on

“Executive Overreach in Regulatory Enforcement and Infrastructure”

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Thank you, Chairman King, Ranking Member Cohen and members of the Task Force, for the opportunity to testify related to the benefits of Congressionally identified transportation improvement projects, more commonly referred to as “earmarks”. We appreciate the critical charge and important work of the Task Force and strongly encourage all possible action to responsibly limit, reduce and eliminate the federal regulatory burden on citizens, business and government entities.

My name is Gary Ridley and I serve as the Secretary of Transportation in Oklahoma.

Today, I want to emphasize several points –

The deficiencies of a long underfunded national transportation system cannot be resolved by the States alone and require an increasing and congressionally influenced federal investment level and a long term improvement strategy.

Scarce federal transportation discretionary dollars should not be unduly influenced by other fringe or completely unrelated initiatives and should instead be wholly focused on critically needed transportation improvements.

Congressionally Identified Projects in Oklahoma

The resolution of our on-going national transportation funding crisis and the crafting of new, more effective project and program delivery protocols must be jointly developed in

a renewed State and Federal partnership. Such a partnership must be based on the trust and alliance between state and local leaders and their congressional members along with the clear, mutual understanding of the critical and growing needs of the infrastructure system.

Oklahoma has a long history of successfully communicating the state's transportation system needs to our congressional delegation and, in turn, receiving congressional support for critically needed investments. Interstate 40 through downtown Oklahoma City and Interstate 44 east of the Arkansas River in Tulsa are two tremendously important examples of dramatic improvements to national transportation linkages that simply would not have been possible for Oklahoma to complete without congressionally directed federal support.

Oklahoma utilizes an Eight Year Construction Work Plan to develop and deliver many of our federally funded projects. This plan is based on identified needs and deficiencies and is highly publicized around the state to enhance our transparency efforts. All projects in this plan have been fully vetted, are considered priority and are being actively advanced through the development process. The encompassed projects are inherently a topic of constant conversation and a focus of the Oklahoma congressional delegation.

Our delegation was always quick to try and help with federal funding for "8 Year Plan" projects when opportunities were presented. It is important to recognize that any new

addition of congressionally identified project funding simply extended the planned investment in the targeted project or enhanced the reach of the overall plan. Where some “earmarks” were doomed to failure, in some states, because there was never enough congressionally dedicated funding to complete the initiative as conceived. Conversely the 8 Year Plan projects are typically well into development and enjoy a solid mix of resource commitments. Multi-faceted resource availability provides for a very high degree of flexibility and offers the greatest opportunity for success.

Competing for Assistance in Today’s Administratively Influenced Discretionary Programs

Make no mistake, transportation infrastructure earmarks still exist today, such as the Tiger program and Fastlane grants, but are largely directed through funding pools left to the discretion of the executive branch and the administration of the associated jurisdictional agencies.

Oklahoma has been successful in garnering discretionary participation in important projects under these “competitive” programs. However, the projects are sometimes developed to include additional elements that divert a percentage of the funding away from more direct transportation infrastructure investments and towards fringe enhancements to garner favor with perceived executive priorities.

I believe that there is an inherent need for a methodology to facilitate congressionally identified projects that can assist with transportation

infrastructure improvements of national significance and that clearly and undeniably support our national transportation network. Opportunities that encourage state leaders and officials interactions with their congressional delegations and that require detailed explanations of the needs of the national transportation network can only have positive outcomes. A carefully directed, transparent project vetting process is paramount and should be mandated before any congressionally identified funding is committed.

In addition, the responsible congressional committee leadership and committee members should be provided with greater influence to shape and direct all facets of the federal program. Discretionary transportation funding programs should be utilized to encourage a greater understanding of the critical needs of the national transportation system and should require the broad support of congress rather than be styled to pursue a narrowly defined agenda dictated almost entirely by the executive branch.

Mr. Chairman and members thank you again for the opportunity to visit with you today and I will be happy to try and answer any questions.