

**United for Infrastructure**  
**Remarks of Suzanne Clark, President and CEO, U.S. Chamber of Commerce**  
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*Remarks As Prepared*

Good morning, everyone—and happy infrastructure week! I’m delighted to be with you today to celebrate the recent historic investments in our nation’s infrastructure. And to discuss how we can work together to seize the opportunities before us that demand leadership and partnership from everyone in this room.

We all know that our future will be as strong, resilient, agile, and competitive as the platform on which it’s built. And to deliver the growth, innovation, jobs, and prosperity that we are capable of, we must modernize our infrastructure with speed and efficiency.

Unfortunately, too often the last words many people associate with Washington are “speed” and “efficiency,” regardless of which side of the aisle you’re on. It’s easy to see why.

We’re still at an impasse on the debt limit—while each passing day without a solution increases the risk of a default. As the previous panel discussed, we can’t get enough workers to fill the jobs of today—let alone the jobs of tomorrow. And it took us years of advocacy to get a robust infrastructure bill across the finish line—despite widespread bipartisan agreement that it was badly needed.

In fact, the Chamber’s engagement on this issue spanned 25 years prior to the bipartisan infrastructure law’s passage in 2021. And everyone in this room deserves recognition for the commitment, endurance, and sheer willpower it took to get it done.

But the fact remains that we risk missing out on the huge promises of this critical legislative achievement.

Today, there are billions of dollars of federal investments ready to go into modernizing our nation’s roads, bridges, railways, and ports. But these critical projects could sit idle for years. And that is time we do not have.

**We Need a Government that Works**

Our economic strength and our global competitiveness are at stake—and we need our government to work, to reject gridlock, and to choose governing. To fulfill its role of setting the conditions for our strength and our success.

So, what does that look like?

It starts with reforming America’s outdated permitting process.

The bipartisan infrastructure law, the CHIPS and Science Act, and the IRA could spur nearly \$2 trillion in investments to build the infrastructure that will keep our nation competitive into the

future. But right now, our permitting process is broken, it's slowing badly needed projects, and it's stifling jobs, opportunity, and economic growth.

We simply refuse to accept that it takes seven-and-a-half years to receive a permit for a new road or bridge in the U.S. And that's just the average. A more complex project takes closer to 10—and some take far longer than that!

[Part](#) of the US-70 Havelock Bypass in North Carolina took 27 years to permit! Not to build—to permit. Unfortunately, there are similar stories across the country—and across other parts of our nation's infrastructure networks.

On average, it takes over five years to get a permit for public transit and almost eight years for ports. And electric transmission line permits can take a decade or more.

It should never take longer to get a permit than it does to build the project, and it is long past time for Congress to act.

That's why the Chamber recently launched our Permit America to Build campaign, calling on Congress to enact meaningful, durable permitting reform before the end of summer. Our campaign has united nearly 350 coalition partners from business to labor, telecoms to trucking, energy to environmental groups, and more.

There is widespread agreement on the need for permitting reform, and we're glad that many of your organizations have joined us in this effort. Now we need action.

This is about finishing the job we set out to do—and about strengthening our nation's economy so America can continue to lead the world.

### **What Permitting Reform Means for Our Competitiveness**

It doesn't matter what industry you're in or what issue you're passionate about, this affects all of us.

For one, we know that American energy production delivers a trifecta of benefits to the U.S. and our allies—from our economic strength to our national security and our emissions reductions. But the inability to predictably and reliably site interstate pipelines is preventing affordable and reliable supplies of domestic natural gas.

We also all want America to lead the world in the energy transition. But when U.S. permitting times are up to [six years](#) longer than that of China, India, and the EU, it places us at a competitive disadvantage.

By one [estimate](#), the U.S. will need over one million miles of new transmission lines to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. Does anyone think that is going to happen if each project takes a decade to get approved?

Another opportunity for U.S. leadership is critical minerals, which power everything from EVs to phone batteries, wind turbines, and more. But 80% of the world's critical minerals come from

China, and as we've been reminded in recent years, it's not a good idea to be over-reliant on China, Russia, or other dubious sources for essential goods. In fact, it's not a good idea to be over-reliant on any source.

The CHIPS Act is supposed to be our answer to our nation's dependence on foreign sources for semiconductors, which undermines our national security. But despite that bill's historic investment in this critical technology, overly complicated NEPA requirements threaten to slow projects, add to the already capital-intensive process of building new facilities, and ultimately counteract the goals of that legislation.

To support America's strength and our ability to lead in the world, we desperately need permitting reform to help us diversify our supply chains, lead on energy security and the energy transition, close the digital divide, and more.

Of course, permitting reform alone will not solve these issues.

We also have to address the worker shortage crisis to ensure businesses have enough qualified workers for the jobs they need to hire.

We must also fix our outrageously broken immigration system by securing our borders and modernizing legal immigration to meet the needs of our economy.

And we need to pursue a market-opening trade agenda that strengthens our resilience, supports our allies, and allows American businesses to reach the 95% of customers beyond our shores.

On all of these priorities and more, we need government to be an enabler—not an inhibitor.

## **Conclusion**

Unfortunately, as we all know, too often that is not the case.

Last month, the Chamber released a [report](#) on this topic where we reviewed a decade of 10-K filings from companies in the S&P 500. In our research, we found that over the past 10 years, mentions of non-public policy risks—things like economic conditions—have remained mostly constant. But during the same time, mentions of risks associated with public policy—things like legislation and regulation—have actually increased 27%.

Some of the most prominent drivers behind this significant jump are constant shifts in power in Washington, a partisan approach to governing, and a willingness by both parties to enact policy through regulation.

As we all know firsthand, it can take over a decade to address even the issues where there is strong bipartisan agreement, like infrastructure. And the regulatory back-and-forth of new or reversed policies every time there's a shift in political power makes it difficult for businesses to operate, invest, and plan for the future.

When government itself is seen as a prominent source of business risk. And when you've got the most significant new investment in infrastructure in a generation and businesses ready to build, but projects can't get approved, something is clearly not working.

The inability to act smartly and strategically for our future is making it harder for all of us to do our jobs, fulfill our roles, and move our country forward.

At the U.S. Chamber, we know that America is a great and capable nation—the recent historic investments in our nation's infrastructure are further proof of that. And all stakeholders—business, government, labor, and more—have to get behind a plan to do the work to advance it.

We cannot afford to squander this once-in-a-generation opportunity. We need to make it possible to build. It's time to put our investment to work.

Thank you.

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