

Thank you, Madame Chairwoman. I look forward to picking up where you and Senator Rounds, through your good work, left off in the last Congress, and moving forward with you and the subcommittee on this topic. And I want to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

I especially want to welcome Ms. Dianne Hunt. Ms. Hunt brings a wealth of experience from owning and managing properties in many Western states, including Wyoming.

When I talk about housing, I like to call attention to rural housing. This is because rural housing is different.

For one thing, people in rural communities are more likely to be homeowners. Homeownership is important to build strong communities and access to homeownership helps families remain in those communities.

But some aspects of what makes rural housing different present challenges. Rural housing is often older. It can be more difficult and more expensive to find someone to fix a leaky roof or replace outdated electrical systems in rural areas.

In addition, lack of safe, affordable housing puts our rural communities at risk. This is especially important to Wyoming, where almost two thirds of the population live in rural areas.

In fact, we call Wyoming a small town with long streets. That's because even though our population is small, our communities are close. It is like one big rural community bound together.

We owe it to Wyoming and all our rural communities to ensure we are spending federal tax dollars efficiently and effectively, by stretching them as far as possible.

I look forward to using today's hearing to learn more about the proposal by my colleagues, Chairwoman Smith and Senator Rounds, to redirect the work of the Rural Housing Service. This hearing is a preliminary step toward legislating in this area, which is ready for bipartisan effort.

I am always glad when we are reviewing programs with a critical eye to see what has been working and where we can do better for the American people.

I also look forward to hearing more from the witnesses about the benefits of the legislation we are considering today. I am eager to hear their ideas about how we can help keep our rural communities strong.

Thank you again for being here and thank you Madame Chairwoman for holding this important hearing.