

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Representative Doris O. Matsui

Hearing on “Strengthening our Communications Networks: Legislation to Connect and Protect”

May 24, 2022

Back in March, this Committee met to execute one of its most important functions, holding an FCC oversight hearing. At that hearing one thing was abundantly clear: there is bipartisan agreement that we cannot let the FCC’s auction authority lapse under any circumstances. Congress has extended the FCC’s spectrum auction authority on a bipartisan basis several times over the last three decades and has never let it lapse. I am committed to keeping that unbroken record intact.

It is no exaggeration to say that the FCC truly sets the global benchmark for spectrum auctions. To date, the Commission has held 98 auctions awarding more than 94,000 licenses and permits, raised more than \$233 billion in revenues, and provided more than \$1 trillion in benefits for the American people.

But, the stakes are even higher right now. In July, the FCC will be kicking-off the 2.5 gigahertz auction bringing more needed mid-band spectrum to market. Even a brief lapse in FCC auction authority could jeopardize licenses from being awarded and delay the carriers’ ability to supercharge their networks with this 5G-ready spectrum. That cannot happen.

The inclusion of Congresswoman Davids’ “Extending America’s Spectrum Auction Leadership Act” on today’s agenda can prevent that. It would extend the FCC’s general auction authority for an additional 18 months to March 31, 2024 providing the needed time to complete the 2.5 gigahertz auction.

I look forward to working in a bipartisan, bicameral way to give the FCC the authority it needs to maintain America’s position as the pacesetter in wireless communications.

I’m also excited to see Congressman Guthrie’s SMART Act on the agenda today. As my fellow Co-Chair of the Congressional Spectrum Caucus, we’ve worked together on more legislation than I can count, and the SMART Act is no different. This important bill would improve spectrum management in the United States by establishing a standardized framework to facilitate spectrum sharing between federal and non-federal users.

While I’m interested in pursuing some clarifying edits with Congressman Guthrie, I’m confident they can be done on a bipartisan basis and set the path for a smooth markup and quick consideration on the floor. This bill is smart public policy and tackles an emerging but crucial issue in American spectrum leadership.

Congressman Carter's ITS Codification Act would also reinforce America's leadership in innovation by providing statutory authority for NTIA's Institute for Telecommunication Sciences. As the research and engineering arm of NTIA, ITS advances innovation in communications technologies through cutting-edge research.

The ITS Codification Act also establishes an initiative at NTIA to develop emergency communication technologies for use in locating individuals trapped in areas where mobile connectivity may not be available.

We also have two bills on the agenda that will increase broadband access and provide new protections to help survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking.

Representatives Luria and Katko's Ensuring Phone and Internet Access for SNAP Recipients Act establishes new reporting requirements to help track and improve Lifeline enrollment among SNAP participants. Ensuring critical assistance programs are working together to serve participants will help deliver better services to those who need them most. Especially as we continue to recover from the pandemic, I believe this bill will help provide information to improve the Lifeline program.

Additionally, Representatives Kuster and Eshoo's Safe Connections Act establishes new protections that will help survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking gain independence. Too often, survivors of crimes like domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, sexual assault, and human trafficking remains stuck on a family or shared wireless phone plan. This allows their abusers to limit their access to family, social safety networks, employers, and support services.

The Safe Connections Act empowers survivors by allowing them to separate a mobile phone line from any shared plan involving an abuser without penalty, including the lines of any dependents in their care. And, it requires the FCC to initiate two rulemakings to connect survivors to the Lifeline program and ensure calls or texts to hotlines do not appear on call logs. It's smart policy and I hope our Committee will consider it at a mark-up as soon as possible.

I want to thank the authors of these bills and the witnesses for appearing today. I look forward to hearing your testimony and now want to recognize my friend, Ranking Member Latta, for his opening statement.