

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on “Accountability and Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission”
May 15, 2019

The American people look to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to ensure they can reliably make phone calls, send text messages, watch television, and access the internet at reasonable rates. They rely on these technologies to check in with loved ones, call for help, operate their businesses, get information during disasters, and engage with people across the globe. To properly fulfill this duty, it has always been my belief that the FCC must put consumers first.

But, over the last two years, this FCC has too often turned its back on the public – putting the big corporate interests first.

This FCC has heartlessly and needlessly proposed drastic cuts to the Lifeline program. This critical subsidy program for telephone and internet access is oftentimes the only way that low-income Americans can keep in touch with friends or family, explore job options, or make medical appointments.

It slashed media ownership rules to allow the biggest media companies to grow even larger—controlling more and more of the news and entertainment that reach Americans and making it more difficult for underrepresented populations such as minorities and women to own or manage media companies.

It has repeatedly deferred to companies on voluntary measures to correct major consumer problems, like robocalls or widespread communications failures after disasters like Hurricanes Maria and Michael.

The FCC has taken more than a year to investigate the widespread disclosure of real-time location data by wireless carriers without taking any public action to require the carriers to stop sharing this data.

Putting aside bad policy, the FCC has also been derelict in its duty. In the first two years of the Trump presidency we’ve seen this agency abdicate many of its important roles.

For example, the Commission has, for the most part, made itself irrelevant when it comes to protecting Americans’ access to the dominant communications technology of our time—the internet.

Even more shockingly, when the Trump Administration took over, the new FCC deliberately walked back its role in cybersecurity, leaving Americans vulnerable. I’m hopeful things will change, but I fear even if they do, we’re starting from behind, because of the decisions this Commission has already made.

Finally, while it touts transparency and the importance of facts, this Commission, much like the Trump Administration, has misled the public and hid some of its actions from public view.

For example, the Commission recently claimed victory over the digital divide, only for us to later learn the Commission was relying on seriously flawed data. According to reports, the Chairman voted to release the Congressionally mandated broadband report knowing that the data in the draft was inaccurate. Despite what the President thinks, the truth matters.

Nevertheless, the Chairman recently touted a new \$20 billion-dollar, infrastructure program, only for us to learn afterwards that it was being funded with repurposed money from the universal service fund.

And at the very same time, the FCC hid its proposal to cap that very same universal service fund, limiting the support that goes to struggling Americans, veterans, schools, libraries, rural health care facilities, and Americans living in rural and hard to reach areas.

Americans don't need repurposed funds, and they don't need gimmicks. People all over this country are looking for a real infrastructure plan that invests in our future and strengthens our economy. That's why we are introducing a comprehensive infrastructure package today, the LIFT America Act, that includes \$40 billion of broadband infrastructure funding for unserved and underserved areas, \$12 billion for next generation 9-1-1, and \$5 billion for financing new infrastructure projects.

The American public deserves better than what this agency has given them. They deserve an FCC that acts in their best interest and not on behalf of the entities it is supposed to be overseeing.

Oversight is critical to getting the FCC back on the right track, and I appreciate the members of the Commission coming before us today. I have faith in the FCC as an institution and I have faith in the exemplary career public servants that work there.