

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
House Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Communication and Technology
Hearing on “The Trump FCC: Four Years of Lost Opportunities”
September 17, 2020

Today, we’re examining four years of lost opportunities at Trump’s FCC. The actions, and at times inactions, of this FCC have had a significant impact in the lives of Americans – and often not for the better. We’re likely to hear from the majority commissioners about their so-called accomplishments, but to me, it reads more like an industry wish list and pandering to an Administration that does not care about consumers. Here are just a couple of the most egregious examples of what the Republican-led FCC did:

- Obliteration of net neutrality regulations that protect a free, fair, and open internet, and abdication of their responsibilities to the Federal Trade Commission;
- Near-complete deregulation of media ownership rules, allowing big media conglomerates to eat up small and local stations;
- Eliminating environmental and Tribal reviews and undermining local authority and protections to give companies the upper hand, even as we all know you can’t streamline your way to universal broadband deployment.
- And using official government processes to allow President Trump to get back at Twitter for, correctly, labeling one of his tweets as false.

These actions are concerning, and thankfully the courts have stepped in to halt some of them. But I am equally concerned about what the Trump FCC has ignored over the past four years. Rather than address the digital divide created by the lack of affordable broadband, the Trump FCC proposed drastic cuts to the Lifeline program. At the same time, we know they used fundamentally flawed data to claim progress closing the digital divide.

Even during this unprecedented pandemic, as broadband has been vitally important to reducing the spread of COVID-19, the Chairman has ignored the millions of families falling through the digital cracks. Rather than extending the E-Rate program to cover the digital classrooms in students’ and teachers’ homes, the Trump FCC accepted students huddled around fast-food parking lots to get a Wi-Fi connection. Just yesterday, the FCC took action on E-Rate, but somehow forgot to help kids with internet connectivity *at home*, where many of them are attending school and doing homework these days. And rather than expand the Lifeline program so that low-income Americans could work or attend doctors’ appointments from home, the FCC asked companies for a voluntary pledge to not cut off customers while allowing charges to pile up. That pledge ended in August.

The FCC has delayed work on network resiliency despite calls from the Democratic Commissioners — sitting on the recommendations of two FCC reports for two years now that would improve the resiliency of communications networks. Those improvements are certainly needed right

now as the west coast faces devastating and destructive wildfires while the Gulf Coast and east coast faces Hurricane Sally.

What a missed opportunity. Even the massive, \$20 billion broadband deployment auction announced by the FCC is based on inaccurate data. Without proper maps, much of the money may be wasted and consumers left unserved. We must do better than this. Looking ahead, I believe these are some of the primary communications policies that we must work together to address:

First, we must make sure that high-speed broadband is open, available, and affordable to everyone. Second, we must ensure that our communications networks are resilient. Voluntary agreements and industry roundtables are not enough. Third, we must secure our communications equipment supply chain from companies like Huawei and remain vigilant to guard against the threats to come. Fourth, we must have a thoughtful, coherent spectrum strategy and stop the interagency squabbles this Administration has fanned. Fifth, we need to ensure that the modern broadcast television and radio industry still reflects our core media principles—localism, diversity, and competition. And sixth, we must hold social media platforms accountable to the public, not thin-skinned demagogues, and discourage the misinformation, discrimination, and violence that undermines our society.

I look forward to continuing our work on these issues. With that, I thank the witnesses for being here today and I yield back.