

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Communications and Technology Subcommittee

Hearing on “Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission.”

June 21, 2023

This is the second oversight hearing of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) since Chairwoman Rosenworcel has taken over, and unfortunately it is also our second hearing with only four commissioners before us. We need an FCC that is at full capacity – with five commissioners, and I still hope that the Senate will finally make this happen soon.

Fortunately, the lack of a full Commission has not stopped the FCC from tackling important issues. The impressive bipartisan work reflects positively on Chairwoman Rosenworcel’s leadership and on the ability of all four of you to work together, compromise, and, largely, put the needs of people over partisan politics.

Thanks to the Commission’s bipartisan efforts to rapidly stand up the Emergency Broadband Benefit and its successor, the Affordable Connectivity Program millions of American families have seen their internet bills reduced by \$30 a month and \$75 if they are on Tribal lands. These are significant savings that are helping more than 18 million families afford the monthly costs associated with broadband service.

It is not surprising that the Affordable Connectivity Program has received bipartisan praise from governors, state officials, and experts nationwide. We must come together to ensure that the program continues to receive the funding that is necessary to make the internet more affordable for millions of American families.

The program is also going to play an important role in ensuring that our historic broadband deployment investments don’t end up building infrastructure that goes unused because people at the other end can’t afford it.

Last month, the Commission released the latest version of the National Broadband Map – the product of the bipartisan Broadband Data Act that we moved through the Committee a few years ago. The map is critical to the implementation of the \$42 billion Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment program in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Accurately mapping unserved and underserved communities is going to allow the Biden Administration to use these historic investments to expand high-speed internet access to communities that have been left behind for too long.

For years, Democrats and Republicans have complained about the lack of accurate broadband maps, and so I applaud you on advancing this effort. Although the maps have taken center stage as we get closer to the Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment program state allocations, I want to acknowledge the hard work of the agency to deliver and continue to improve what is surely the most granular broadband map we've ever had. The goal is close the digital divide in these communities so that they can grow their economy for the future.

I would also like to commend the FCC for its work on implementing the Martha Wright Reed Act to end predatory phone rates being charged to incarcerated people and their families. The Commission also adopted rules promoting broadband competition in condos and apartment buildings to help lower costs and provide additional options, a first-of-its-kind broadband "nutrition" label, giving consumers more transparency into internet access plans. These are all pro-consumer rules that provide consumers the tools they need to make the internet more affordable.

Of course, there is still more work to do. For instance, despite some significant steps forward with my TRACED Act, robocalls remain not only annoying, but dangerous. Your requests for additional authority have not gone unheard, and I am determined to continue working to put an end to this problem once and for all. I'll be introducing legislation in the coming months to fix loopholes that allow these calls to continue, update the authorities of our expert agencies, and empower consumers.

Similarly, you've told us that we're facing a shortfall in the rip and replace program. Removing Huawei and ZTE and other suspect equipment is a critical national security issue, and I assure you that we are working hard to make sure that program doesn't come up short.

And the agency's lapsed spectrum authority not only deprives the Commission of a core agency function, but it impacts a massive sector of our economy and jeopardizes our global wireless leadership. I'm proud of the bipartisan action this Committee has taken to rectify the situation, and we will not rest until we get that process back on track. We must restore the FCC's spectrum auction authority.

Finally, I remain concerned about the last administration's reversal of net neutrality authority. This reversal leaves consumers without protection when it comes to bad behavior by broadband providers. Broadband is the central communications technology of our day, and yet we don't have a broadband regulator, and that means consumer protections are falling by the wayside. We need to fix that.

I again thank all four commissioners for joining us today and for all the work you've done successfully on a bipartisan basis.