

Statement of Representative Anna G. Eshoo (as prepared)

Subcommittee on Communications and Technology

House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Promoting Broadband Infrastructure Investment

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In the early 2000s, access to a broadband connection was considered a luxury. If you could download a music file in mere minutes, you were living the high life. In just a few short years, much has changed. Today, broadband access is ubiquitous with access to employment opportunities, education, health care and commerce. It's used for advanced research among our academic elite, and it's a conduit of democracy for a new generation of voters.

Yet 55 million Americans lack access to the broadband speeds needed to unlock everything the Internet has to offer. Equally alarming is the fact that more than half of U.S. households have just one choice for high-speed broadband service. Despite an impressive \$46 billion investment by the top four telecom and cable companies last year, the U.S. still ranks 17th globally in Internet speed.

The fact of the matter is that there won't be another \$7 billion broadband stimulus anytime soon. So 'bold' and 'innovative' should be our operative words when discussing broadband deployment policies. This is about our collective future. So where should we be bold, and where can we be innovative?

For years I've advocated for a 'dig-once' policy. Quite simply, broadband conduit should be included during the construction of federal highways just as gas and electric lines are. Recognizing the enormous benefits of this cost saving measure, President Obama included it as part of a 2012 Executive Order to accelerate broadband infrastructure deployment.

Many new broadband entrants also face challenges in accessing utility poles and other rights-of-way. According to former FCC Chairman Reed Hundt, the use of existing poles is nearly a tenth of the cost of having to dig underground trenches through streets and sidewalks. When a provider ultimately gains access to these rights-of-way, the terms should be fair, reasonable and nondiscriminatory.

Another barrier to broadband deployment comes from state laws, established at the behest of incumbent providers that restrict or ban municipal broadband networks. Earlier this year, the FCC voted in favor of bolstering 21st century broadband infrastructure in local communities by preempting state laws in Tennessee and North Carolina. Across the country, local communities including Palo Alto and Santa Cruz County in my Congressional district have demonstrated their desire to bring fast, affordable broadband to their residents.

Finally, through the power of unlicensed spectrum, Wi-Fi can expand broadband coverage in underserved communities, including rural and tribal lands. The 600 MHz band and its ability to penetrate walls and travel longer distances makes it uniquely situated to serve these and other communities on a nationwide basis.

These aren't by any means a cure-all prescription to what ails our nation's broadband system. But they are concrete steps I believe Democrats and Republicans can support. More importantly, they are steps that will bring greater access to broadband for millions of Americans who need it.

I thank our distinguished witnesses for their commitment to promoting broadband infrastructure investment and I look forward to your testimony.