

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology Ranking Member Doris Matsui

Hearing on “The Fiscal Year 2025 National Telecommunications and Information Administration Budget”

May 15, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Latta.

I’d like to start by thanking NTIA Administrator, Alan Davidson, for testifying today and whose leadership has been instrumental in guiding our nation’s telecommunications policy.

As innovation speeds up, NTIA’s role as the agency responsible by law for advising the President on telecommunications and information policy has never been more important. From spectrum and internet governance to overseeing the deployment of AI systems; NTIA is making decisions now with far-reaching consequences.

Despite this, NTIA has not been reauthorized for more than 30 years. Thankfully, today, the House will be voting on the NTIA Reauthorization Act which Chairman Latta and I lead. This crucial bill will help the Agency better execute its vital federal mission.

Perhaps no part of that mission is more important than ensuring the continued success of the Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment or BEAD program. Born of the bipartisan infrastructure bill, BEAD represents our best shot at ensuring every American has access to affordable, reliable, and high-speed internet. But, it’s important to remember that BEAD is more than just a broadband deployment program. It’s a program designed to close the digital divide. To that end, it’s not enough to simply build broadband in every neighborhood or hamlet in the country, we must make sure that broadband is affordable and accessible to all.

Thankfully, the statute that created BEAD ensured that affordability was a foundational component of this program. By requiring state plans to include a “low-cost” option, the statute acknowledges that deployment is only one facet of a wholistic effort to close the digital divide.

That’s why Ranking Member Pallone and I sent a letter to NTIA signed by every Democrat on the Subcommittee urging NTIA to continue prioritizing affordability as it reviews state plans. Doing so isn’t just good for American consumers, it ensures that ISPs have a reliable customer base as they deploy in previously un- or underserved areas.

My district stretches from the urban core of Sacramento all the way down to the delta, including small agricultural towns and farming communities. And, whether I’m in downtown Sacramento or small hamlets, I hear about broadband affordability. The high cost of broadband isn’t an urban or rural issue, it affects all Americans. That’s why I’m so glad to see NTIA taking it head on.

NTIA's crucial affordability work has only been made more urgent with the looming lapse in ACP funding. With 23 million American households relying on the ACP to help make ends meet, a loss of this program could be a devastating blow to connectivity. Democrats have been laser focused on keeping this program alive. I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will finally come to the table to talk about sustaining this vital program.

While we fight to keep American families connected to the ACP, NTIA must continue its vital work reviewing the affordability components of state plans. I'm excited to hear from Administrator Davidson about those efforts. But to close the digital divide and fuel the innovation America needs to lead, we must also remain focused on NTIA's statutory role as manager of the federal government's use of spectrum. Taken together the National Spectrum Strategy and Presidential Memorandum on Spectrum offer a roadmap for sustained American leadership. That means empowering NTIA to speak on behalf of the federal government and setting aggressive timelines for studies of the bands identified.

But all of us will need to stay engaged with this process to ensure we hit our goals. why I sent a letter with Chairman Latta requesting an update on how they'll be proceeding in the critical study of the lower 3 gigahertz band. For this and any other bands identified in the National Spectrum Strategy, it's vital that the parameters and methodologies for these studies are driven by engineering and science. I'm committed to continuing my work with Chairman Latta to ensure our Subcommittee provides the necessary oversight to make sure that happens.

But there is more I'm hoping to cover here today from Open RAN to AI governance and I'm excited to get going.

So I want to again thank Administrator Davidson for appearing before us today and with that, I yield the balance of my time.