

Committee on Energy and Commerce

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

Hearing on “Oversight of President Biden’s Broadband Takeover”

November 30, 2023

For the first time in too long, I’d like to welcome all five Commissioners of the Federal Communications Commission to this Committee. And welcome, for the first time in your new role, Commissioner Gomez.

While this is an FCC oversight hearing – Committee Republicans want to focus on broadband, which is fine with me. Because after all, President Biden and Congressional Democrats delivered for the American people with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. That’s driving broadband access, adoption, and affordability across America.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law invests \$42 billion in bringing broadband to every corner of this country. It’s lowering internet bills for 22 million American families through the bipartisan Affordable Connectivity Program. And it’s preventing digital discrimination, so everyone gets a fair chance to connect to the internet and participate in our economy. While this historic law garnered some Republican support, not one Republican on this Committee today voted for it. If broadband affordability and accessibility are so important to my Republican colleagues, I would have thought they would have joined us in supporting this historic investment in all of our Congressional districts.

The FCC, under the leadership of Chairwoman Rosenworcel, has played an outsized role in making our broadband aspirations a reality.

The FCC built the successful Affordable Connectivity Program that is making broadband more affordable for more than 22 million American families.

It also recently released the third version of the National Broadband Map, which will help states identify the unserved and underserved areas eligible for the \$42 billion in broadband funding.

The Chairwoman is also putting consumers first by examining junk fees and data caps, requiring rebates for consumers subjected to television blackouts, and increasing the minimum speed for broadband service.

The Commission is also putting consumers first by proposing a rule to restore Net Neutrality.

As internet connections are becoming more and more critical to our everyday lives, Americans are tired of spending hours attempting to resolve issues with their broadband service.

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They are tired of waiting endlessly for a broadband provider to serve their neighborhood. They would welcome a referee on the field. It's just common sense.

The net neutrality rulemaking will correct an unpopular and misguided Trump administration policy change that amounted to a dereliction of the FCC's nearly 100-year-old duty to oversee our communications networks. Since that change, the FCC's traditional oversight functions have been frustrated when it comes to broadband networks – limiting its ability to investigate network outages, protect consumers, and promote national security. Indeed, since the previous administration gave up authority over broadband, nearly 250,000 consumer complaints against broadband providers have piled up at the FCC. That's 250,000 complaints that have not been investigated or addressed. Restoring net neutrality protections would once again allow the FCC to resolve these complaints, and that would be a major win for consumers.

Of course, there is still more work to do. While we have seen some success with my TRACED Act, we haven't yet solved robocalls and robotexts. I'll be introducing legislation soon to provide the FCC with more tools to stop the menace of robocalls.

Congress must also continue to fund critical programs within the FCC's portfolio. The Affordable Connectivity Program could run out of funding in the second quarter of next year – and we just can't allow that to happen. The Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Reimbursement Program also faces a \$3 billion shortfall. Additional funding is necessary if we are going to be fully successful in removing hardware from our networks that compromises our national security. I hope that Congress can come together and keep these important programs going.

And of course, we must restore the FCC's spectrum auction authority. I know that Chairwoman Rodgers has been as concerned about that as I am.

Again, I welcome all five commissioners here and I yield back the balance of my time.