

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.**  
**Committee on Energy and Commerce**  
**Subcommittee on Communications and Technology**

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

**May 15, 2024**

Today, as we conduct important oversight of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), it’s important that we recognize the tremendous amount of work the agency is doing to connect all Americans to fast, reliable, and affordable internet service.

NTIA is implementing the game changing policies that President Biden and Congressional Democrats delivered as part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and its historic \$42 billion investment in broadband infrastructure. You cannot streamline your way to universal internet coverage—you have to make real investments and set the goal high, like this law does. It will fund the infrastructure that will bring reliable internet now and last for years to come, rather than settling for second-class speeds and technology that will only leave these communities behind again when the next technology comes.

But funding broadband infrastructure alone will not close the digital divide. For millions of Americans, the cost of internet service is too high. That’s why we included an important broadband affordability provision in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. It requires that providers who receive grant funds to build out this infrastructure must offer a low-cost option to certain households in the build out areas. The statute allows states to determine what that low-cost figure will be. It also sets out a process for the NTIA to approve or disapprove of that number.

Some Republican critics of this policy wrongly characterize it as rate regulation. This is a misreading of the statute. Republican opponents are simply working with the internet providers to make monthly internet costs higher for the very communities set to finally receive internet service.

We should be doing all that we can to make internet service more affordable for Americans, and that includes funding the Affordable Connectivity Program. This month, millions of Americans are seeing an increase on their internet bill because the House Republican leadership refuses to extend funding for the program. This cannot continue. I urge my colleagues again to work with Democrats to get this done.

The NTIA is also hard at work implementing the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law’s Digital Equity Program. This program will make sure everyone has the resources, skills, and devices to connect to the internet and participate in our digital economy. This is especially important given the broadband adoption barriers faced by communities, like seniors and veterans, who do not always have the resources to take full advantage of the opportunities the digital economy offers.

All of the broadband programs in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will strengthen our economy for the future, grow the middle class, and create good-paying American jobs.

NTIA also oversees federal spectrum users and coordinates with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to ensure that our airwaves are effectively managed. I remain extremely frustrated that Congress still has not been able to reauthorize the FCC's spectrum auction authority after its expiration in March of 2022. As Chair Rodgers and I have said for over a year, this reauthorization should not be delayed any further. I am concerned that this lapse will hinder us on the global stage, especially as we continue to compete with China in the development of advanced wireless technologies.

Despite this lapse, President Biden has made great strides in modernizing our nation's spectrum policies. The President has reaffirmed the roles of NTIA and the FCC in managing the nation's spectrum resources. NTIA has built on these directives with a National Spectrum Strategy and an implementation plan. These actions are an important first step in enhancing how we manage this critical natural resource to help strengthen America's technological leadership.

The NTIA also has important responsibilities in public safety communications and examining emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence and Open Radio Access Networks. I look forward to the House passing the bipartisan NTIA Reauthorization Act later today, which touches on many of these issues.

I look forward to hearing more about these topics from Administrator Davidson today and thank him for being with us once again.

Before I close, I wanted to clarify Committee procedure for Member panels after last week's field hearing in Bakersfield on rural broadband. Madame Chair – despite what occurred at the field hearing – I would like to confirm that it remains the practice of the Committee not to ask questions of Members of Congress who testify before the Committee. (Rodgers will respond.)

Thank you Madame Chair, and I yield back the balance of my time.