

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

Hearing on “Lights, Camera. Subscriptions: State of the Video Marketplace”

September 21, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Latta.

This is an issue that should be familiar to all Members of this Subcommittee. We’ve had a version of this hearing before, and we’ll need to keep having them until all Americans have equal access to broadband regardless of their zip code.

This issue is also very personal to me....the small towns and hamlets in my district are desperate for modern internet connectivity. When I’m back home in cities like Galt or Walnut Grove, the people that I meet with can literally tell me neighborhood by neighborhood where there’s connectivity and where there’s not. But for too long, their local knowledge has been undervalued and their requests for service have fallen on deaf ears.

Thankfully, Congress acted and I’m more hopeful than I’ve ever been that we’ll be getting them the connectivity they deserve. The bipartisan IJA provided \$65 billion to expand access to broadband through new deployment and adoption efforts. This includes \$42 billion for the BEAD program which will support deployment of new broadband infrastructure projects. BEAD will be successful because it addresses the fundamental impediment to broadband deployment – economics.

In rural areas where populations are more spread out, private companies can’t afford to deploy or operate a network. In those areas, BEAD will provide the needed support to connect these residents. Continuing to support NTIA and the states as they implement BEAD is the single most powerful tool we have to connect our unserved constituents. But it’s imperative that we take a wholistic look at all existing broadband support mechanisms to ensure they’re solvent.

That’s why I’m excited to join Chairman Latta in representing the House in the bipartisan, bicameral working group to modernize the Universal Service Fund. The USF is one of our most effective models for expanding connectivity. Whether that’s in rural areas or schools, to support telemedicine, or for low-income families, USF is connecting Americans.

However, without reforms, USF’s future is uncertain. USF is a bedrock of our communications policy in the U.S. and it’s imperative we get it on solid footing. That’s why this working group is so important. It shows there’s bipartisan, bicameral willingness to address these tough issues head on. I’m excited that Chair Latta and I will be joining Chairman Lujan and Ranking Member Thune to advance this effort.

And as we all know, USF isn't the only area that needs immediate attention. The Affordable Connectivity Program is helping millions of families afford a broadband connection. Whether that's for the first time, or when you need a little extra help making ends meet, the ACP program is working. But, without additional funding, more than 21 million households could soon lose connectivity. With funding set to be depleted early next year, initial notices of service termination could be going out during the height of the holiday season in December. That's a present none of our constituents deserve to receive. I'm committed to doing everything I can to find additional support to give us time to find a lasting solution to sustain ACP. It's a bipartisan program that helps rural and urban families alike and it must be continued.

I'm also looking forward to a meaningful discussion about broadband access that includes not just access and affordability, but also adoption. In March, I reintroduced my Digital Equity Foundation Act to establish a nonprofit foundation that would channel public and private investments into broadband adoption efforts to close the digital divide. Not only because it's the right thing to do, but because increased adoption means more broadband customers, which improves the business case for ISPs. So it's a vital leg of the connectivity stool and it needs to be a part of our discussion today.

With that, I want to thank our witnesses for being here today and look forward to this important conversation. I yield the balance of my time.