

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

Hearing on “Oversight of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration”

December 5, 2023

The Committee is conducting important oversight of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). While NTIA may not be a household name, the agency has done an immense amount of work in the last two years to help connect all Americans to high-speed, reliable, and affordable broadband.

And thanks to the historic broadband investments we included in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, NTIA will continue to play a crucial role, along with the states, in achieving universal broadband coverage throughout our nation. In the coming months, the agency will also help advance secure and cutting-edge wireless technologies. It will also work to ensure social media and artificial intelligence are operating in the best interests of all consumers, including our children.

NTIA’s role in our nation’s future is crucial because broadband is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity. Indeed, without broadband, millions of Americans cannot do their jobs, run their small businesses, study for school, meet with their health provider, or connect with family and friends. And right now, about 24 million Americans have no access to home broadband.

Fortunately, President Biden and Congressional Democrats delivered for the American people last Congress with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law—a law that helps us close the digital divide by making a historic \$42 billion investment in broadband deployment. This investment is going to help drive reliable, high-speed broadband access across America.

But we know that infrastructure by itself will not close the digital divide. And that’s why we included the Digital Equity Program in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. It will make sure everyone has the resources, skills, and knowledge to connect to the internet and participate in our digital economy. This is especially important given the barriers to broadband adoption faced by some communities, like seniors and veterans, who do not always have the capabilities to take full advantage of the opportunities that come with being online.

The broadband provisions in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law are a major step in growing our economy for the future and expanding the middle class, and yet, not one Republican sitting on this Committee today supported this landmark investment in broadband deployment.

I look forward to getting an update from NTIA today on all of these important broadband programs.

NTIA also oversees federal spectrum users, coordinating with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to ensure that our airwaves are effectively managed, and advising the President on advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence.

I am extremely disappointed that Congress has still not reauthorized the FCC's spectrum auction authority after its expiration in March. As Chair Rodgers and I have said for months, it is critical that this happen as soon as possible. I am concerned that this lapse will hinder us on the international stage, especially with the World Radiocommunication Conference taking place right now in Dubai. Additionally, Congress designated NTIA as the manager of federal spectrum and it must continue to move forward in exploring opportunities to make additional federal spectrum available for commercial wireless use.

Unfortunately, the previous Trump administration failed in its approach to spectrum management, which led to unnecessary and harmful spectrum disputes. It also left the current administration without any spectrum studies on the horizon—studies that if done responsibly take time but minimize disputes among the parties involved.

That's why I'm pleased President Biden recently issued a memorandum on modernizing our nation's spectrum policy. The President reaffirmed the roles of NTIA and the FCC in managing the nation's spectrum resources and directed NTIA to develop a National Spectrum Strategy by the end of this year. NTIA has already released the strategy and is now seeking comments on how to implement it. These actions are important steps forward in enhancing how we manage this critical natural resource and will help strengthen America's technological leadership.

Finally, NTIA plays an important role in public safety communications. From managing next generation 911 grants, to its oversight of FirstNet, and its important first responder work at the Institute for Telecommunication Sciences, NTIA remains at the forefront of ensuring that the public and law enforcement agencies have a modern and reliable communications network.

So I know you do a lot, and I think people are not aware of how much you actually do. We have a lot to discuss today, and I welcome Administrator Davidson back to the Committee. I look forward to his testimony, and I yield back, Chairman Latta.