

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"

June 30, 2026

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration plays a critical role in planning and coordinating U.S. communications strategy at home and abroad, expanding internet access and connectivity, and improving public safety communications. As the President's principal advisor for telecommunications policy, the NTIA Administrator is responsible for leading an agency charged with ensuring Americans continue to have reliable access to communications capabilities.

The BEAD Program was established and funded as part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in 2021 to provide a generational investment in broadband infrastructure for unserved and underserved communities across the country. For decades, we have heard countless stories about how pervasive the digital divide has become, especially in rural communities.

That is why passing that law was a victory not just for red states or blue states, but for all communities lacking internet access. This program was meant to address that inequity with state-of-the-art investments that would last for multiple decades.

Unfortunately, the Trump NTIA has strayed far from that mission since January 2025. Despite pushback from both Republicans and Democrats at all levels of government, the Trump NTIA is barreling ahead with its shady restructuring of the BEAD program while impounding billions of taxpayer dollars in grant funds across a number of programs authorized and appropriated by Congress.

Commerce Secretary Lutnick and NTIA Administrator Roth have repeatedly violated the law and defied Congressional intent in a manner that is increasing the cost of internet service and, I fear, opening the door to waste, fraud, and abuse.

Hidden behind the veil they call "the benefit of the bargain," the Trump Administration forced states to throw out their broadband plans and bullied state broadband offices into awarding as many locations as possible to Elon Musk's SpaceX on the basis that it is the cheapest option. Not the best option, or the right option, but the cheapest option. When it comes to critical infrastructure like bridges or pipelines, and yes, broadband, Americans just want the job done right.

Even then, low-Earth orbit (LEO) broadband solutions, like Musk's Starlink, are only cheaper than the alternatives if you do not factor in each technology's lifespan and costs over time.

Let me be clear: satellite connectivity is an important component of the broader communications ecosystem, but NTIA's changes to the BEAD program ignore the fact that Starlink is already accessible to the public. Although prohibitively expensive for many Americans, any household or business currently lacking internet access could sign up today without one dime of taxpayer money.

At the end of the day, all NTIA has done is secure hundreds of thousands of locations where satellite is now the lone monopoly provider, robbing consumers of choice and competition that are fundamental to making service affordable for middle-class families.

By taking thousands of miles of fiber off the map, the Trump Administration has unnecessarily condemned vast swaths of rural America to the connectivity equivalent of a band-aid, ignoring the spirit and intent of this generational infrastructure investment. To make matters worse, NTIA has yet to demonstrate with any certainty that LEO providers will meet and sustain the statutorily required performance metrics at scale.

The Trump Administration is also failing to enforce the statutory requirement of the law that BEAD grantees offer a low-cost service option that is truly affordable to qualifying consumers.

This is yet another example of the Trump Administration driving up everyday costs on hardworking American families. It's bad enough costs are skyrocketing as a result of Trump's reckless tariffs and his reckless war of choice with Iran, but now his Administration is defying the law and refusing to ensure consumers have access to low-cost service options for their internet service, as the law intended.

While households are finally being connected under BEAD, the Trump Administration's inexcusable revamping of the program not only stopped getting shovels in the ground but is also increased costs.

Now we are seeing broadband providers leave the BEAD program and surrender their awards one after another, not because of decisions made by the states, but because of moving goalposts and mismanagement from NTIA.

To minimize the damage already done, NTIA must immediately deliver each state's nondeployment funds with maximum flexibility for their use, consistent with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act. Time is running out to put these dollars to good use, and the delays have gone on long enough.

And with that I yield back the balance of my time.