

**SUMMARY OF STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER ANNA M. GOMEZ
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

JANUARY 14, 2026

- For months, this FCC has asserted an apparent roving mandate to police speech that this Administration does not like, invoking an undefined and unchecked concept known as the “public interest” standard.
- The First Amendment protects against government interference with speech, and the Communications Act prohibits the FCC from engaging in censorship.
- FCC must clearly define what it means by the public interest standard. Congress must insist on guardrails that prevent content-based regulation and protect against the FCC acting as an arbiter of speech.
- We’ve seen a clear pattern of retreat from practical, consumer-focused initiatives.
 - The Commission eliminated E-Rate support for school bus connectivity and hotspot lending by schools and libraries. Ending these programs removed one of the most effective tools we had to help people participate in the digital economy and avoid being left behind.
 - The Commission has rolled back limits on exorbitant prison communication rates. Vulnerable families will now be paying higher phone rates because of the FCC’s actions.
 - The Commission has proposed to weaken the broadband nutrition labels it previously adopted, making it harder for consumers to compare prices, speeds, and fees before they sign up for service, and making it easier for prices to rise.
 - The Commission has stalled the Cybersecurity Trust Mark after years of bipartisan work, leaving consumers without a practical tool in an increasingly risky digital marketplace.
 - In a nation that is home to millions of non-English speakers and that welcomes millions of international visitors each year, the Commission has delayed bipartisan efforts to provide consumers with multilingual emergency alerts.
- We should measure success not in deployment statistics, but in human outcomes: who is connected, who is protected, and who is fully included. That is the standard the FCC should be held to, and the responsibility it must return to if it is to fulfill its mission.

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Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Pallone, Chair Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, Vice Chair Allen, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

As we enter 2026, I think it is worth stepping back and asking not just what the Federal Communications Commission has done for consumers, but where it has been directing its energy. Too often, that energy has gone into culture-war fights instead of the day-to-day work of protecting consumers and expanding access to reliable and affordable broadband.

From my perspective, the FCC has drifted from its mission in two ways that should concern this Committee. First, it has exercised its authority in ways that raise serious First Amendment concerns. Second, it has retreated from meaningful consumer protections that make a difference in people's lives.

Let me begin with the First Amendment.

For months, this FCC has asserted an apparent roving mandate to police speech that this Administration does not like, invoking an undefined and unchecked concept known as the "public interest" standard.

Instead of functioning as a principle intended to serve the public, this standard is being treated as a license to weigh in on content, viewpoint, and editorial judgment.

This is not what the FCC was created to do. The Commission's job is not to police content, root out media bias, or guarantee favorable coverage for any administration. Its responsibility is to regulate communications infrastructure and markets, not censor the speech that flows through them.

The First Amendment protects against government interference with speech, and the Communications Act prohibits the FCC from engaging in censorship. In a free society, the government does not decide what speech is acceptable or aligned with its views. When the government's media regulator claims the power to judge content or police bias, we move away from oversight and closer toward censorship and control.

That is why it is so important for the FCC to clearly define what it means by the public interest standard, something I have called on it to do repeatedly. It is also why Congress must insist on guardrails that prevent content-based regulation and protect against the FCC acting as an arbiter of speech.

At the same time the Commission has pushed beyond its proper role, I do want to acknowledge the Commission's continued bipartisan work on robocalls, which remain the FCC's top source of consumer complaints. But beyond that, we are seeing the FCC retreat in core areas that make communications more affordable, more transparent, and more accessible.

Affordability is now one of the biggest barriers to staying connected.¹ Programs like the Affordable Connectivity Program helped millions of households afford basic service. When that support lapsed, the impact was immediate. Yet rather than making affordability a central priority, the Commission has failed to treat that loss with the urgency it demands.

Instead, what we have seen is a clear pattern of retreat from practical, consumer-focused initiatives.

- The Commission eliminated E-Rate support for school bus connectivity and hotspot lending by schools and libraries. For many students, seniors, and families, these programs were their only reliable connection to the internet. Ending them removed one of the most effective tools we had to help people participate in the digital economy and avoid being left behind.
- The Commission has rolled back limits on prison communication rates that were mandated by law. For those in prison, these communications are often the only way to stay connected to family and maintain the support needed to return successfully to society without turning back to crime. Vulnerable families will be paying higher phone rates because of the FCC's actions, undermining both basic fairness and the promise of just communications.

¹ Kelly Wert, *Every State Identifies Broadband Affordability as Primary Barrier to Closing Digital Divide* (October 4, 2024), <https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2024/10/04/every-state-identifies-broadband-affordability-as-primary-barrier-to-closing-digital-divide>.

- The Commission has proposed to weaken the broadband nutrition labels we adopted under the last Administration. These labels were meant to show consumers clear information about prices, speeds, and fees before they sign up for service. In plain terms, they told people how much they were actually paying and what they were actually getting. When that information is watered down, it becomes harder to compare options and easier for prices to rise.
- The Commission has stalled the Cybersecurity Trust Mark after years of bipartisan work. This voluntary, market-based program was designed to help consumers identify connected devices that meet baseline cybersecurity standards. Those delays have left consumers without a practical tool in an increasingly risky digital marketplace.
- The Commission has delayed bipartisan efforts to provide consumers with multilingual emergency alerts. In a nation that is home to millions of non-English speakers and that welcomes millions of international visitors each year, that delay means life-saving alerts may not reach those who need them most. As we prepare to host premier international events like the World Cup and the 2028 Olympics, language barriers should not needlessly become a public safety risk.

None of the policies this Administration has sidelined are symbolic. Each one was designed to make communications more affordable, more transparent, more secure, or more accessible. Taken together, their rollback or delay reflects a Commission that is spending less time on the needs of consumers and more time on ideological priorities and the needs of billion-

dollar corporations. In today's world, universal service cannot simply mean building networks. It means ensuring people can actually afford to use them. Without government agencies like the FCC focused on affordability and consumer protection, even the largest investments in broadband deployment, including the BEAD program, risk becoming digital bridges to nowhere.

How we define success here matters. Leadership in AI and other investments should not be measured by how many miles of fiber we lay or how many data centers we build, but by whether people can actually connect, participate, and benefit from a new digital economy. If students cannot afford broadband, if families cannot trust the security of their devices, if incarcerated individuals are cut off from support, and if emergency alerts fail to reach whole communities, then no amount of infrastructure will close that divide. We should measure success not in deployment statistics, but in human outcomes: who is connected, who is protected, and who is fully included. That is the standard the FCC should be held to, and the responsibility it must return to if it is to fulfill its mission.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.