

Representative Robert J. Wittman, VA-01

Chairman Doyle and Ranking Member Latta,

I represent the First District of Virginia, which faces unique challenges to expanding broadband. The First District spans the I-95 Corridor in Northern Virginia, which includes some of the foremost tech companies and data centers in the nation and continues southeast to the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula, which is home to some of the most unserved rural populations in Virginia.

Citizens in more urban areas in the northern part of my district benefit from the highest quality broadband the market has to offer. With access to speeds upwards of 1 Gigabit, these citizens have unfettered access to services such as telemedicine, online education, and modern business applications and technologies that allow businesses to compete in the 21st Century. These services are a convenience that many folks have come to take for granted in 2019.

This is not the case in the more rural parts of my district. As population density decreases, the business case for providers simply is not there to extend service to these unserved areas. Many communities and neighborhoods throughout the Northern Neck, Middle Peninsula, stretches of Stafford County and localities east of Richmond struggle to gain access to reliable broadband. As a resident of this area who drives back and forth to DC every day during session, I understand first-hand the plight of rural residents when it comes to gaining quality high speed internet.

In rural areas, broadband is oftentimes the top issue I hear about—as mothers and fathers complain about late nights sitting in the McDonalds parking lot as their kids use the WiFi to finish their homework; children of elderly parents plead for quality broadband to access telemedicine services so their parents don't have to drive an hour to the nearest health facility; or business owners that know better quality broadband would allow them to grow their businesses. Demand for high speed broadband has never been greater.

Closing the digital divide is the key to lifting up countless communities and populations in unserved areas. While Congress has made great strides in tackling this issue, more can and should be done.

Further emphasizing policies that promote Public-Private Partnerships (P3s) is essential. As I mentioned earlier, as the population densities decrease in rural areas, P3's incentivize providers through an influx of capital funds to build in areas where the business case would often not exist without it.

Addressing our nation's broadband mapping capabilities is also important to closing the digital divide. It is no secret our broadband maps can be wildly inaccurate and often lead to overbuilding on already existing networks. I am an original cosponsor on H.R. 3162, The Broadband Data Improvement Act of 2019, which would require providers to report data on a

geolocation basis to create an improved National Broadband Map that better targets funding to the areas that need it most.

Another important element in preventing overbuilding is through instituting challenge processes. H.R. 3162 establishes a periodic challenge process at the FCC, by which the public and incumbent providers may challenge data on the National Broadband Map. The FCC must then analyze any challenges that may suggest the map is incorrect and resolve any disputes to update the map accordingly.

I strongly urge the Committee to markup and pass this legislation so that it can advance to the floor for a vote.

Lastly, we must continue to eliminate the labyrinth of red tape and regulations that continue to hinder shovel ready projects and streamline our federal permitting process.

I want to thank Chairman Doyle, Ranking Member Latta, and Members of the committee for this opportunity to testify today. As co-chair of the House Rural Broadband Caucus, I offer my assistance on the subject and would certainly love to work with you on these items to help close the digital divide in my district.