



COMMITTEE ON
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DEMOCRATS
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Pallone Says FCC is Siding with Corporations Over Consumers At First Oversight Hearing

Washington, D.C. – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks at a Communications and Technology Subcommittee hearing on “Oversight and Reauthorization of the Federal Communications Commission.”*

I’d like to thank the FCC commissioners for joining us this morning – our first FCC oversight hearing of this Congress. While I’m glad that you are all here today, this hearing should have occurred months ago. The Republican majority had no problem conducting oversight of the previous Obama Administration, holding quarterly oversight hearings. But now that their own party controls the Commission, we’re six months into the administration and this is our first hearing with the new commission. I hope that this is not a sign of things to come because the Commission’s own actions have shown the critical need for Congressional oversight.

To date, most of the FCC’s actions have ignored the needs of consumers. Too often, when given the choice, this FCC has sided with large corporations to the detriment of hardworking Americans.

The Commission started the year by making it more difficult for competitors to offer broadband to low-income people through the Lifeline program.

It continued with a scheme to encourage more consolidation in the media industry, which would eliminate voices from the air.

Last week Chairman Pai refused to commit to protecting the funds necessary to close the homework gap as part of the popular E-Rate program in our schools.

And then there is the alarming outright refusal by the FCC to protect the security of our broadband networks at a time when the Russians and others are looking for new ways to break in.

But the highest profile example of the FCC siding with large corporations over small businesses and hardworking Americans is its attempt to eliminate net neutrality.

Net neutrality is crucial for our democracy by giving everyone an equal voice online—especially those communities too often overlooked by traditional media. Each of us gets to decide which videos we watch, which sites we read and which services we use. Nobody gets to influence that choice – not the government and not the companies that run the networks.

Net neutrality also allows small businesses to flourish. These small businesses—many of which are owned by minorities and women—are responsible for more than half of the jobs in the country today.

If the FCC moves ahead with its net neutrality plan the consequences will be severe. Their plan will have a chilling influence on our democracy, cut away at our connections with each other, and limit economic opportunities for the future.

The FCC claims its plan is necessary because consumer protections might deter investment in network infrastructure. But this narrow-minded view of the public interest can lead to cruel results. I hope that the Commissioners really listen to the millions of comments that are coming in from around the nation, and reconsider their dangerous plan to eliminate net neutrality.

This is not only an oversight hearing today – the Republican Majority recently surprised us all with a 42-page reauthorization bill that had absolutely no Democratic input. This bill is flawed. It slashes \$18 million from the FCC's budget – the same agency that is having issues keeping its website up and running. This is not serious legislation, and it does not bode well for any serious legislation being developed by the majority of this subcommittee on any major communications issues.

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