

Opening Statement of the Honorable Marsha Blackburn
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on “Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission”
October 25, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

Good afternoon and welcome to our first hearing in 2017 with a fully formed Federal Communications Commission. As often seems to be the case, the Senate has taken its time, but I’m pleased to see the Commission back up to speed with five vastly different opinions about everything telecom-related. We’re here today to conduct oversight of the agency, which is this Subcommittee’s primary role.

It is very important that we fulfill our oversight responsibilities, because we have given the FCC a critical mission and critical tasks to fulfill. From the Commission’s disaster response efforts, to its work supporting the deployment of rural broadband, to its efforts to streamline and modernize the regulatory environment impacting some of America’s greatest creators and innovators, you are all doing important work, and we appreciate it.

One of the FCC’s many jobs is to regulate broadcasters, who accept and fulfill unique public interest obligations due to their use of valuable public spectrum. While we were in the final stages of planning for this routine oversight hearing, my Democratic colleagues asked the Committee to hold an entire hearing about comments by the President on Twitter regarding certain broadcasters’ work.

So I fully expect them to use this opportunity to try to turn this hearing into the Trump Tweet hearing. Chairman Pai, since we have a very full slate of issues, my hope is that you will address that concern so we can focus on the work of the Commission.

This Commission has conducted entirely appropriate oversight of broadcast licensees. There is no indication it has any interest in regulating political content, unlike some of my Democratic colleagues who have urged the FCC to adopt a new Fairness Doctrine, mandating that broadcasters provide equal time to the opposition if they allow anyone to express any type of political opinion on air.

The outrage over the President’s Twitter musings stands in sharp contrast to the silence as Twitter cuts off the voices of conservatives, sexual assault victims, and potentially anyone who posts something they just don’t like for whatever reason. All this on a platform so powerful and far-reaching that you could argue it serves as a modern day public square.

Some left wingers on Twitter have even called for the company to ban the President's account. After my recent experience, all I will say is I wouldn't put it past them. The latest Twitter "scandal" is an attempt to distract both the Commission and the American people from the FCC's real work: delivering on its mission to unleash American innovation.

Chairman Pai, no matter what loaded YES OR NO questions may be posed today, or what insinuations are made about a would-be plot by the FCC to crack down on political speech, I urge you not to be distracted. Keep your eye on the ball. We are waiting for important reforms to address the media ownership rules, the Lifeline program, the imperatives of expanding rural broadband and restoring a free and open Internet, and we want to see them by the end of this year.