

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Marsha Blackburn  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
Hearing on “Closing the Digital Divide: Broadband Infrastructure  
Solutions”  
January 30, 2018**

*(As prepared for delivery)*

Welcome to the subcommittee’s first hearing of the new year. And I must say we are off to a very promising start. We wanted to have a very inclusive hearing today to discuss all of the ideas from Subcommittee members on both sides of the aisle to promote broadband infrastructure deployment with a goal of closing the digital divide. Whether you agree or disagree with any individual idea, it is so important that we get the conversation started. And we have plenty to talk about, with 25 bills introduced in time to be part of our hearing today. I very much appreciate all of the thoughtful proposals and look forward to seeing many of them progress in the coming weeks.

These legislative initiatives follow the leadership of President Trump’s recent efforts on broadband infrastructure. As stated in the President’s recent Executive Order:

“Americans need access to... broadband internet service to succeed in today’s information-driven, global economy.

“Currently, too many American citizens and businesses... lack access to this basic tool... [and] this problem is particularly acute in rural America.”

Collectively, the bills to be examined at this hearing are targeted at promoting innovation, cutting red tape, and advancing public safety.

Together, Congress and the administration can help span the digital divide so all Americans may fully realize the innovations made possible by broadband.

This will require expanding broadband to unserved areas, supporting deployment of advanced networks and new technology, as well as helping citizens recover from hurricanes, floods, fires, and other disasters.

It's impossible in my allotted time to highlight each bill, but I do want to call attention to a couple of resolutions expressing the guiding principles on broadband infrastructure that should underpin our efforts:

First, as noted by Vice Chairman Lance, any funds for broadband in an infrastructure package should go to unserved areas.

Second, as noted by Congressman Latta, the federal government should not be picking winners and losers in the marketplace; any federal support for broadband infrastructure should be competitively and technologically neutral.

If we adhere to these principles, I am confident we can avoid the pitfalls of waste, fraud, abuse, and inefficiency that marred the previous administration's efforts on broadband infrastructure.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Congress should be mindful of the significant amounts of private capital spent to support broadband deployment. Since passage of the bipartisan 1996 Telecommunications Act, the private sector has invested roughly \$1.6 trillion in their networks.

This investment includes wireline, wireless, and other broadband technologies. However, this investment experienced a decline that coincided with the FCC's 2015 decision to reclassify the competitive broadband marketplace under Title II of the Communications Act, an outdated relic of the 1930s monopoly-era.

I want to reiterate our support for Chairman Pai who corrected this ill-conceived policy and returned us to the light-touch regulatory approach that allowed the digital economy to flourish. This light-touch approach has been the bedrock of communications policy since the Clinton administration.

As I have previously stated: history makes clear that countries with the best communications have the highest economic growth. Continuing our nation's leadership is, and must remain, a bipartisan effort.

I am pleased to convene this hearing, and I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses.