

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Oversight of the National Telecommunications and Information
Administration
March 6, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning and welcome back, Assistant Secretary Redl! We have been looking forward to this moment for quite some time.

Energy and Commerce has long been leading the charge to close the digital divide. For over a year now, we have held hearings on broadband deployment and sought ways to incentivize buildout. Our telecom subcommittee recently held a legislative hearing on numerous infrastructure proposals that provide plenty of opportunity for the Committee and NTIA to work together toward this end.

As the Energy and Commerce Committee continues to identify ways to accelerate broadband deployment, we first need to know which areas are truly unserved, so those areas are prioritized first. Mapping efforts have in the past been undertaken by NTIA, but responsibility shifted to the FCC in 2014 when the funding lapsed.

While we appreciate the FCC's efforts to improve the Form-477 data, we need a better funded NTIA to be able to aggregate that information with the data from multiple outlets across the states and with other innovative ideas that are popping up to harness deployment coverage that may not get submitted in a carrier's compliance with the FCC process.

As you all will recall, this Committee held a hearing on broadband mapping last June to discuss how we can better define and map granular broadband coverage. One of the proposals that flowed from that is Congressman Johnson's H.R. 4810, with support from Congressman Guthrie, that gets things moving again at NTIA. I'm pleased that those

efforts have already yielded some progress as the Administration is asking our friends at the Appropriations Committee for \$50 million for NTIA to get back in this space.

The last time policymakers moved ahead without adequate mapping, we spent billions of dollars and didn't ever have a sense of what we got for it. This time around, we are going to get the mapping right. It is critical.

And as we move ahead on ways to accelerate broadband buildout, we're beginning to see the buildout of another important network: FirstNet. With all states and territories having now opted-in, FirstNet should be full steam ahead building out the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network to make sure our public safety professionals have interoperable, mission-critical access to broadband. As we saw with 9/11 and have since seen with active shooter scenarios and natural disasters, such as the wildfires in Oregon, interoperability is critical for first responders. As NTIA continues its oversight of FirstNet, I look forward to seeing the implementation of the FirstNet plan.

Finally, this agency plays an important role in assessing policy challenges across a gamut of issues. From spectrum allocation to public safety, NTIA has a full plate. As we continue our oversight of the agency, we should consider how its role should evolve given its prominence in communications and information policy. Given the role NTIA plays in driving the American economy, it is vital that the agency has the tools it needs to establish an environment that fosters competition and innovation.