

**Opening Statement of Chairman Marsha Blackburn
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“From Core to Edge: Perspective on Internet Prioritization.”
April 17, 2018**

(As prepared for delivery)

Good Morning everyone, and welcome to our witnesses. We are here to talk about prioritization. Not just paid prioritization – all prioritization online. Despite what some of my colleagues sometimes seem to think, prioritization is not a dirty word. The Internet is based on it.

In the net neutrality conversation there is a common misconception that the Internet is one big highway, where all the cars travel at the same speed and we cannot allow for any fast lanes or toll lanes to exist without causing a big traffic jam for everybody else. Something like this picture:

Picture of traffic jam

Our witnesses today know that this could not be further from the truth. This picture is a lot closer to reality, in fact it probably still gives you an oversimplified idea of the internet. Different connections, different agreements, and different prioritization, depending on needs.

Picture of mixing bowl interchange

And the amazing new capabilities that we will experience on next generation networks will be realized not only through innovation in the chips and the servers and the infrastructure, but also through even more efficient and effective prioritization.

I would also point out that in real life, all sorts of interactions are prioritized every day. Many of you sitting in this room right now paid a

line-sitter to get priority access to this hearing. In fact, it is commonplace for the government itself to offer priority access to services. If you have ever used Priority Mail, you know this to be the case. And what about TSA pre-check? It just might have saved you time as you traveled here today. If you define paid prioritization as simply the act of paying to get your own content in front of the consumer faster, prioritized ads or sponsored content are the basis of many business models online, as many of our members pointed out at the Facebook hearing last week.

Prioritization is sometimes crucial from a public policy standpoint. Just as we all want the ambulance and the fire truck to be prioritized over the rest of the traffic on the highway, there is a need for voice packets to be prioritized over data packets to make sure that your 9-1-1 call gets through first. And there are lots of other examples where we can all agree that certain data and certain applications should be prioritized on the network. One of our witnesses is pioneering a technology to provide real-time audio support to the visually impaired, describing the surroundings and the nonverbal interactions taking place around the user. Other examples that our witnesses will discuss today include telemedicine and autonomous vehicles.

Prioritization of data on the network is not unique, or uniquely harmful. It may be an uphill climb, but what we are trying to do with this hearing is to leave aside the simplistic “fast lane” talking points and kick off a more realistic discussion on the subject. My net neutrality bill left out the old language banning all paid prioritization because I believe that we need a more nuanced approach, and a more thorough and thoughtful discussion. For the government to consider a ban on any prioritization on the Internet, paid or unpaid, we need a better understanding of what specific harmful conduct we are trying to address, and a better understanding of how to leave the door open for the beneficial prioritization that’s necessary to keep the Internet as we know it working, and to bring even more benefits to consumers.