

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Robert E. Latta
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology hearing on
“Legislating to Connect America: Improving the Nation’s Broadband Maps”
September 11, 2019**

As Prepared for Delivery

Welcome to today’s subcommittee legislative hearing on potential solutions to accurately map broadband availability in rural America. I thank our witnesses for joining us and providing their thoughts on this issue. Extending the reach of broadband in rural Ohio, and across America, is critical to ensure everyone can participate in the digital economy.

Since passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the private sector has invested roughly \$1.7 trillion in their broadband networks. We should

acknowledge this investment in rural deployment and ensure that government-supported solutions complement private capital instead of competing with it. This has become increasingly important with some proposals calling for as much as \$150 billion in government funding to publicly own and operate networks nationwide.

Today's legislative hearing features several bills introduced by Committee Members who deeply understand the lack of connectivity across their districts. Our constituents tell us when they don't have service and it's through their voices that I've worked with my colleagues on two bipartisan bills

that will be discussed today. The Broadband MAPS Act, which I introduced with Representative Welch, would help to verify reported data through a public challenge process. And, the Broadband DATA Act, which I've developed with Representative Loeb sack, would take a comprehensive approach to fixing our nation's maps. I'm hopeful that this bill will build on the success our of previous partnership to deploy broadband to rural farm lands through the Precision Agriculture Connectivity Act.

As we look to the FCC's next round of Universal Service Funding, it is vital that we work in a bipartisan way to make sure there is a verified,

accurate, and granular foundation upon which we make these funding decisions. Congress has an important oversight role to play in ensuring that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. With limited federal dollars to go around, we simply cannot afford to mis-identify areas as served which are truly unserved. Only with accurate and granular data will we begin to close the last frontier of the digital divide.

It is also critical that a robust, user-friendly challenge process is in place to appropriately dispute potential inaccuracies within the coverage maps.

We must get the maps right and creating a

pathway for the Commission to consider additional broadband data will help achieve that goal. As we move toward committee markups, I anticipate continuing discussions with my friends across the aisle on several outstanding issues, such as:

- striking the right balance between protecting competitively sensitive information while providing transparency to consumers;
- ensuring we can leverage data the best we can across the Federal government;

- addressing the cost of the fabric and the ongoing review of the fabric's reach and effectiveness; and,
- examining unintended impacts of certain requirements on small businesses.

I thank the Chairman for holding this hearing, and I'm committed to working with my colleagues on these issues through regular order. I yield the remainder of my time to Mr. Long.