

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Greg Walden**  
**Subcommittee on Communications and Technology**  
**"Legislating to Connect America: Improving the Nation's Broadband Maps"**  
**September 11, 2019**

*As Prepared for Delivery*

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome our witnesses to this hearing on the importance of accurately mapping broadband availability in America.

This is an issue I've been working on for two decades. Many of you will remember that I advocated 'mapping before money' for the Obama administration's stimulus act. Unfortunately, I was voted down along party lines, but my warnings and those of my Republican colleagues were borne out, and documented by news outlets, such as Politico in an article entitled "Wired to Fail."

While market incentives have expanded broadband access and made communicating and participating in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy easier than ever before, much work remains to connect all Americans to high speed broadband. It's past time to get accurate mapping data.

Take the community of Weston in eastern Oregon as an example. Mayor Jennifer Spurgeon describes their internet service as being dial

up, just without the modem noise. They frequently experience sub-megabit speeds. You can imagine they are surprised to learn they have 100-megabit service according to the FCC's map.

Under my Chairmanship, this Committee worked in a bipartisan fashion last Congress to enact legislation to promote rural broadband, and I'm hopeful we can continue to build on our past success.

We included provisions in RAY BAUM's Act to improve the methodology for the collection of mobile service coverage; streamline access to easements, rights-of-way, and lease requests for deploying communications equipment on Federal property; and improve the efficiency of spectrum allocation.

As we continue our oversight of RAY BAUM'S Act as well as our efforts to spur broadband deployment in rural America, we must also ensure that the Universal Service program is efficiently and effectively reaching truly unserved areas. I applaud Chairman Pai for his leadership on this front, proposing a Rural Digital Opportunity Fund using cost-efficient reverse auctions to better allocate limited Federal support.

At the same time, we must ensure that the FCC is relying on accurate and sufficiently granular information when making these

decisions. There are areas that we all know are unserved, and sufficiently precise data will help better reach these areas. Too often, the areas most in need of Federal broadband support get lost in the rush to dole out government funds, especially when program rules distort eligibility for some areas that are already adequately served. Without the best available data identifying parts of the country that need funds most the vicious cycle of leaving rural Americans behind will continue.

The Senate has already moved a consensus bill through their Committee to address this issue, which I believe represents an interesting path. The legislation before us today rightly underscores the importance of this issue and the attention it has earned among members of the Committee. There are a number of issues which Republicans are committed to working on with our counterparts—such as how we’re going to provide funding, how to balance publicly available information, how to improve data sources, and how we can best leverage the data to the greatest extent possible across the Federal government.

Other members have also put forward bills to address rural broadband challenges, and these proposals deserve consideration as well. I expect we’ll hear about some of those other bills today.

Thank you again for holding this hearing today, I hope we can continue working on a bipartisan basis through regular order to get the job done.