

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Accountability and Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission.”
December 5, 2019**

As Prepared for Delivery

Good morning, and welcome back to all of the Commissioners for our second FCC oversight hearing this year. It has been a busy year at the FCC under Chairman Pai’s leadership, and I want to thank you for working so diligently on behalf of American taxpayers and consumers.

You have all heard me, along with many of my colleagues on this subcommittee, talk about the need for broadband in rural America. My constituents from Bend to John Day and many others in rural parts of our country want access to the Internet.

The Universal Service Fund helps achieve this goal by providing funding for the deployment and maintenance of broadband service in rural areas. As policy makers, our primary goal is to ensure that Federal resources are allocated responsibly.

And in that vein, we must have accurate broadband maps to properly identify those places. This committee recently passed two bipartisan mapping bills aimed at improving data collection and

mapping efforts at the FCC. But recent actions taken by this Commission are concerning.

We learned from a press release yesterday that the FCC is establishing a new, \$9 billion fund, with \$1 billion specifically for facilitating deployments facilitating precision agriculture needs. While I support investing in 5G for rural areas, I have no details on this plan and have many questions because the Chairman's office did not reach out to me OR my staff to explain how they intend to use this money. I am also unclear as to how the FCC found \$9 billion for this purpose – all while still waiting for the maps to be adequately updated. To be clear – this committee has oversight authority over the FCC, and I have serious concerns that we are not being informed of their actions until hours before an oversight hearing takes place. We will take appropriate measures to make sure that the FCC is exercising regulatory humility and respecting THIS committee's oversight role in its actions.

Since we obviously need to be crystal clear about our intentions for FCC action from this committee, I'd also like to note the importance of ensuring that Federal programs outside of the Energy and Commerce Committee's jurisdiction remain consistent with the Committee's goal of promoting private investment in broadband infrastructure deployment. Sometimes, various programs trying to achieve the same goal are not

always in sync. Last Congress, we appropriated more than \$600 million toward broadband funding programs. As that money begins making its way out the door, I welcome an update from the Commissioners here today as to how the FCC is consulting with other agencies as we required by legislation last year.

Switching gears, I'd like to turn to spectrum issues that have recently raised quite a bit of attention. The FCC announced that they would pursue a public auction of spectrum in the C-Band. As the law stands now, any proceeds from an FCC auction would go to the Treasury for deficit reduction, rather than going toward bipartisan priorities like facilitating the nationwide transition to Next-Generation 9-1-1. I think that it is important to legislate and look to my colleagues on the other side to work with us on this issue in the coming weeks. As we have these discussions, we must work with current licensees, potential bidders, and others so that this auction moves quickly, and we preserve U.S. wireless leadership.

I have sought for years to find consensus solutions to spectrum challenges. As Chairman Pai knows well, one of the issues I have been focused on is how to address certain challenges facing our public safety officials and telecommunicators as we continue moving into a digital world, including finding a solution to the T-Band auction.

As an author of the legislation that created FirstNet in 2012 via the *Middle-Class Tax Relief Act*, I am familiar with the commitments and the trade-offs that have been made to make sure that public safety has access to their critical communications needs.

At the same time, it is also imperative that we put a stop to 9-1-1 fee diversion so that states stop using fees paid by consumers to support essential 9-1-1 services as slush funds for unrelated programs.

At the last FCC oversight hearing, and other times over the last several years, I have floated proposals as to how to delay or repeal the T-Band auction process and welcomed thoughts on how to reconcile these related issues. I have not been taken up on that offer, so I must say that I find it interesting that just this week Chairman Pai called on Congress to repeal the T-Band auction mandate, which was not coordinated nor discussed with me or my staff, despite our efforts to find a solution. So, with the deadline fast approaching, I would like to take this opportunity to again repeat my call to affected parties to work with me and my colleagues on finding a consensus solution.

I look forward to hearing testimony from the Commissioners on these and many other important topics, and with that I yield.