

Opening Statement of Republican Leader Robert E. Latta
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Empowering and Connecting Communities through Digital Equity and Internet
Adoption.”
January 29, 2020

As Prepared for Delivery

Good morning, and welcome to today’s hearing on broadband adoption. Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

One of the great success stories that has provided a building block for Internet adoption and its widespread deployment is the success of Wi-Fi. As Co-Chair of the Wi-Fi caucus, I understand the role Wi-Fi has played in bringing Internet connectivity into millions of homes across the country. Under a light-touch approach, the first set of flexible rules put in place in the early 2000s paved the way for an explosion of broadband expansion. This deregulatory framework helped democratize the Internet so that millions can enjoy the benefit it brings. Since then, hundreds of billions of dollars of investment has poured in, and new networks have been built across the country.

Many companies have made great strides over the last decade to connect millions of low-income households to high-speed broadband. While this Committee’s efforts have largely focused on promoting broadband *deployment*, the private sector has recognized that there is

great value in connecting the unconnected: not only for its own business interest, but for the communities they serve.

Yet, some Americans remain unconnected. Over the last decade, we have focused on closing the remaining gaps in broadband deployment so that every American – no matter where they live – can have access to the Internet. While unfortunately too many remain without an option at all, some who have access to the Internet still do not subscribe. As I am sure we will hear today, there are a variety of reasons why some people choose not to adopt broadband service.

We can debate these reasons – and my hope is that the data and research can shed some light on that today – but as we consider the potential for new Federal programs or legislation, I urge caution that we are not forcing a one-size-fits-all solution with a heavy hand from Washington. Our focus should be on putting consumers first by allowing them the flexibility to choose an Internet plan that meets their needs – if any plan at all.

I also ask that we carefully consider whether there is a need for an expanded Federal role at a time when State and local governments continue to make strides providing willing consumers with the tools to connect to the Internet. As we will hear today, many States are working

hard to serve their communities in ways that the Federal government could never do from Washington. To the extent more action is needed, it would be helpful to hear what state programs have been successful at providing options to consumers. While everyone operates in a resource-constrained environment, we should better understand the existing problems and solutions operating today before simply throwing more money at a problem we may not fully understand.

I look forward to learning more about those efforts currently underway and what the data can show us. Thank you again to our witnesses, and I yield back the remainder of my time.