

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Greg Walden
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 and digital equity. I want to thank our witnesses for testifying before us today on this important issue.

The internet has truly transformed the lives of people throughout the world. It plays a central role in how Americans conduct business, interact, and make daily decisions. Under a light touch regulatory framework, the internet has thrived, providing Americans access to numerous services, and serving as the single most important driver of economic growth and job creation.

While the internet has been largely adopted in a relatively short span of time, there are still millions of Americans who do not have access to the internet in their homes. In some cases, it is because high-speed broadband has not been deployed, an issue that this Committee has focused on for many years. And while we have made progress in promoting broadband deployment, particularly in rural areas, there are many Americans who remain unconnected, even if they do have access to broadband service options.

Recognizing this issue, companies have made great strides over the last decade to connect millions of low-income households to high-speed broadband. For example, the Internet Essentials program – developed by one service provider - offers high-speed broadband at an affordable price and has seen great success. It has connected 8 million people in over 2 million households, more than a federal program could likely achieve in the same period of time, and provides opportunity and access for low-income individuals. We must make sure that our policies allow for continued experimentation with ways to promote broadband adoption.

It should be noted, that where there are gaps in adoption, state and local governments have done a great job providing support and outreach to their communities. They have firsthand knowledge of the challenges their communities face, and work with the resources they have to find creative solutions. I am excited to have witnesses here today that can talk about some of the innovative work that is being done at the local level to address the adoption issue.

But let us not put the cart before the horse. In many parts of the country, but especially frontier communities like Eastern Oregon, broadband availability remains elusive. John Day, for example, is so

limited in internet service that during one of my visits last year, the whole town had been experiencing internet outages intermittently for a couple weeks and we had to pay with cash at the gas station because they couldn't process cards, making it hard to do business.

It's only been a decade since broadband deployment has exploded into an everyday necessity, and without first addressing the lack of broadband availability, any Federal resources put forward for broadband adoption could further enlarge the digital divide if not done carefully.

To be sure, today's hearing will hopefully bring data to the discussion so we can get a better understanding of barriers to broadband adoption. I am happy that we are following regular order and holding a hearing to examine the breadth of the issue on such an important topic.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here, and I yield back.