

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Robert E. Latta  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
“Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission”  
September 17, 2020**

*As Prepared for Delivery*

Thank you, Mr. Chairman; and thank you Commissioners for testifying before the subcommittee today. Since the last time you joined us, the communications landscape has changed rapidly.

Even before we had to deal with the problems that came as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the communications industry has been one of the fastest-evolving fields in our economy for decades. Despite the challenges the pandemic has highlighted, I have been pleased to see the swift, overwhelming response by both the industry and the FCC to address these problems in ways that prioritize American consumers. Chairman Pai’s Keep Americans Connected pledge is a perfect example of this dedication, where carriers voluntarily committed to keeping all Americans connected, regardless of their ability to pay their bills.

By working with – not against – the industry and in the public’s best interest, the FCC was able to secure connectivity for countless American families, despite widespread loss of income across the country—and without the need for heavy-handed regulations. Contradicting initial fears that we would see mass disconnection or

sticker shock when the pledge expired, service providers have instead started the process of easing their services back to normalcy—reflecting our citizens’ steady re-entrance into the job market.

On top of keeping Americans connected to their schools, jobs, and loved ones through the Internet, the FCC successfully distributed the \$200 million that Congress appropriated through the CARES Act to make sure countless Americans could utilize telehealth to get the care they need remotely. In my district, this allowed a behavioral health provider to go from seeing 467 patients remotely to over 16,000 patients. An expansion of telehealth at this scale may have seemed impossible only a few years ago, but now millions of Americans are able to see their doctors safely from their own homes.

But it’s not just the FCC’s quick reactions that have kept our communications running smoothly. The groundwork for our strong communications infrastructure had been laid by policies that came well before the COVID-19 Pandemic.

By pivoting away from misguided efforts to regulate the Internet the same way we regulated monopolies almost 100 years ago, the FCC’s light-touch regulatory approach has endured, allowing broadband providers to focus on building out infrastructure, providing service to

consumers, and offering voluntary programs and community service efforts. This investment and agile network management has allowed our communications network to hold up during these times, despite the heavy traffic our systems have had to bear over the past few months.

Yet despite these successes, Mr. Chairman, you have decided to hold a partisan hearing today. We should be here to talk about ways to close the digital divide, and how Congress can help the FCC in achieving that mission. Unfortunately, this partisan approach has become a trend. Under Republican leadership, this committee unanimously passed an autonomous vehicle bill that soared through the House and passed countless other measures to improve broadband access. **In fact, 96% of the bills passed out of this Committee under Chairman Walden received bipartisan votes.** But under your leadership, we have been unable to advance AV legislation again or many other bills that could easily gain bipartisan support. However, I hope today we can still have a productive conversation about the work that the FCC has done and ways to close the digital divide.

And finally, I want to thank Republican Leader Walden for his years of leadership on these issues. This may be his last FCC Oversight Hearing, and his work on Communications and Technology issues led to many of topics of discussion I am sure we will hear about today.

I thank our commissioners for their testimony today, and I yield back.