

Attachment—Additional Questions for the Record

**Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on
“Connecting America: Broadband Solutions to Pandemic Problems”
February 17, 2021**

Jonathan Adelstein, President and CEO, Wireless Infrastructure
Association

The Honorable Robert E. Latta (R-OH)

1. Mr. Adelstein, do you have any information about how much money and time carriers spend on complying with all the regulations necessary to deploy broadband in both cities and rural communities? How will permitting reforms allow for flexibility to make investments needed to meet consumers’ needs?

RESPONSE: Wireless industry investments during the 4G era totaled \$261 billion – a 43 percent increase from the decade prior. The U.S. wireless industry is now poised to invest another \$275 billion to build 5G networks, which will create 4.6 million direct and indirect jobs and contribute \$1.7 trillion to the U.S. GDP in the next decade. For this investment to be most effective, permitting policy at all levels of government needs to be streamlined and flexible so that the limited private capital can be used most efficiently. Many municipalities have recognized the value of robust broadband and work closely with industry. However, there are still some local governments that needlessly slow down wireless deployment in their communities by erecting unnecessary barriers to build out. While the exact cost is difficult to pinpoint because it is spread so widely among communities and private businesses who are affected, they are substantial and slow broadband deployment. WIA members work closely with local governments to ensure that all communities benefit from wireless broadband and have found those with the lowest barriers to deployment tend to attract more investment.

The Honorable Richard Hudson (R-NC)

1. Mr. Adelstein, thank you for being here today as we examine this critical issue. My constituents in North Carolina and Americans across the nation are facing a digital crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed how important it is to have access to broadband and without it, Americans have found themselves unable to access lifesaving telehealth services, our students unable to continue their education while schools remain closed and adults struggling to work remote. It is imperative we come together as Republicans and Democrats to work together to

bridge the digital divide and close the homework gap.

Congress has allocated billions in COVID-19 relief packages to increase broadband connectivity, worked on broadband mapping legislation to best understand where resources are needed, and the FCC recently released the results of the RDOF Auction which is critical funding for last mile service which will connect that rural North Carolinian who was left behind. We are doing incredible things to ensure our constituents can access the internet. However, the government cannot do it alone. Throughout the pandemic our ISPs have offered low-cost internet access and have not shut off service for missed payments. I applaud them for their efforts. These companies know and can respond to these communities like mine because their employees are members of the same communities they serve.

Recently, Energy and Commerce Republicans have released a package of bills which will help streamline the cumbersome permitting process, increase broadband deployment and quickly get access to those who don't have it. With a large swath of my district a national forest, I was proud to introduce The Federal Broadband Deployment Tracking Act, which would require NTIA to submit a plan to Congress on tracking the acceptance, processing, and disposal of requests for communications use authorizations on Federal property.

Currently, there is a massive bureaucratic backlog of requests which is holding back deployment of broadband on federal lands where mine and a lot of members constituents live.

We are all aware of the large amount of traffic that hit our communications network with the onset of the pandemic. Your testimony notes that our networks held up and responded to these new burdens more effectively than some parts of Europe, China, and others. This in addition to the many voluntary efforts providers have made to provide increased access for low-income Americans, students, and others.

- a. Could you explain the difficulties experienced by other countries, and why our networks were able to keep functioning as normal?

RESPONSE: COVID-19 brought forth new challenges and new opportunities for broadband deployment. The wireless industry's network investments enabled the entire economy to sustain itself during the pandemic. Work-from-home, remote learning, and telehealth have all generated an unprecedented demand for wireless connectivity anchored by the need for wireless infrastructure. And the wireless industry is meeting the challenge.

In fact, U.S. networks' performance during the pandemic continues to demonstrate why our networks are the envy of the world. COVID drove mobile traffic up 20 percent, essentially overnight. Yet, mobile data speeds kept pace. This was not

the case in other countries. According to an Ookla report, China's mobile download speeds saw speed decreases of up to 40 percent during their peak COVID restrictions, while Italy saw decreases of up to 23 percent, and Spain saw decreases up to 15 percent. Over two-thirds of European countries experienced mobile speed decreases of up to 30 percent in late March 2020, according to OpenSignal.

U.S. wireless success is not accidental. The U.S. wireless industry invests nearly \$30 billion every year; combined with a timely supply of spectrum, due to the leadership by of this Subcommittee and the FCC, a regulatory framework that promotes investment in responsible wireless infrastructure, and U.S. wireless industry innovation, this is a recipe for success that put the U.S. in a better position than Europe during the pandemic.