

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Broadband Equity: Addressing Disparities in Access and
Affordability”
May 6, 2020**

As Prepared for Delivery

INTRO

Good morning and thank you to our witnesses for coming before the committee today.

Access to broadband has never been more important than during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because of the performance of broadband networks in the United States, millions of Americans have access to reliable connections...

...to work from home, educate their children, access health care, connect with loved ones, and maintain their communities of worship.

This was possible because of the critical investments made by broadband providers over the past decade.

Which is why, during the pandemic, American broadband networks rose to the challenge...

...by increasing speeds and capacity while facing unprecedented demands for access.

EUROPE

Unlike their European counterparts, American broadband providers were never forced to reduce streaming speeds or content quality.

This is no accident. U.S. providers have invested more than \$1.8 *trillion* in broadband infrastructure in recent decades...

...and spend more than three times as much per household per year than companies in the EU.

These investments have not only paid dividends in terms of fast speeds, high performance, economic growth, and job creation...

...but also in creating competition and making broadband more affordable...

Thanks to competitive pressures, innovation, and a light-touch regulatory environment...

...broadband prices have seen a significant decline over the past decade.

It is no surprise that over the last 6 years, we have seen an increase in broadband adoption numbers across America.

FAMILIES

These trends are only going to continue....

... and they must--so we fully close the digital divide in both rural and urban communities.

It's critical for families to be connected to have a more secure future and better quality of life.

Healthcare... education... and economic opportunity are dependent on connectivity.

Just think about the children who lost an entire year and counting of education because schools are closed and they have no internet access.

What does the future look like for them?

Or the parents, including millions of women and working moms, who dropped out of the workforce because remote work wasn't an option for them.

WINNING THE FUTURE

We must rely on solutions that work to boost access and unleash opportunities.

Solutions that support American prosperity, ingenuity, and free enterprise.

Solutions like the 28 bills in our Boosting Broadband Connectivity Agenda, that would remove unnecessary barriers that stand in the way of innovation and investment.

There is bipartisan agreement that all Americans should have access to broadband at affordable prices, regardless of their address.

As a result of the pandemic, we recognized this need...

...and enacted the \$3.2 billion Emergency Broadband Benefit program to help. This was the right way to take action given the circumstances and it will help more people access reliable broadband.

The Committee also recognized the valuable contributions of private providers who voluntarily signed the Keep Americans Connected pledge...

...and committed not to disconnect anyone due to their inability to pay.

Now, we need to study these efforts on broadband adoption before fundamentally transforming the broadband industry.

The policies proposed by our Democratic colleagues and the Biden Administration include federally regulating the rates that private companies can charge for broadband service.

They would prioritize inefficient, government-run networks at expense of private networks with a record of success ...

...and create arbitrary speed thresholds, that favor fiber-only projects, with no restrictions to prevent overbuilding in areas where broadband already exists.

I am confident that we all want to close the digital divide...

...but the only way to truly achieve this is to lead with solutions that drive results—not more government centralized power.

Studies have suggested that for broadband affordability, private companies have better incentives to increase adoption.

Research from the Technology Policy Institute found that that private companies have succeeded in increasing broadband adoption where digital literacy training has failed.

[Mr. Chairman, I request unanimous consent to enter this study into the record].

Before appropriating more money, we must closely inspect the impact that the recently appropriated \$3 trillion will have on the communications industry, and our economy, in order to avoid enacting burdensome policies.

Today, we will examine some of the sweeping reforms that have been proposed by our Democratic colleagues...

...and consider the potential chilling consequences they might have on investment, competition, and innovation.

I thank the Chair and yield back.