



THE COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE
CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION

October 5, 2021

The Honorable Mike Doyle
Chairman
Subcommittee on Communications and
Technology
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bob Latta
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Communications and
Technology
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Doyle and Ranking Member Latta:

On behalf of NATE: The Communications Infrastructure Contractors Association, we are pleased to submit for the record this letter outlining the Association's views on some of the nation's most pressing communications issues.

NATE is a non-profit trade association dedicated to providing a unified voice for companies in the diverse tower and communications infrastructure industries. Today, the Association represents almost 1,100 member companies that construct, service or maintain hundreds of thousands of communications towers and next generation networks throughout the United States and 13 other countries.

We are proud of the efforts being undertaken by our member companies and their tower technicians to help address such critical priorities as closing the digital divide, expanding broadband, promoting safety within our industry and developing and training a workforce capable of effectively managing the surging demand for wireless services.

There can be no question that communications infrastructure is indeed "critical infrastructure," essential for our nation's economic competitiveness, homeland security and vital communications capabilities. We note with pride that NATE has championed the inclusion of telecom funding in federal infrastructure legislation for over two decades, and is extremely pleased that the "Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act" includes \$65 billion for broadband.

NATE members are committed to closing the digital divide and are currently on the front lines deploying broadband infrastructure to all corners of the United States. We support a number of proposals that can help address this important issue, starting with the pending \$1.2 trillion infrastructure package. We believe that this legislation can greatly accelerate the deployment of broadband to rural, unserved and underserved communities while enhancing this country's economic competitiveness, homeland security and vital communications capabilities.

NATE also advocates for the enactment of several other broadband initiatives, including Rep. Fletcher's "Broadband Incentives for Communities Act," which would help communities across the country upgrade and expand their broadband infrastructure through a competitive grant program, and Rep. Kelly's "Accelerating Broadband Connectivity Act."

NATE also commends members of this committee for their Boosting Broadband Connectivity Agenda, which would facilitate deployment and permitting of telecom facilities, modifications to existing wireless facilities and collocations. We congratulate Ranking Member Latta and Reps. Foxx, Griffith, Carter, Joyce and Kinzinger, among others, for their initiatives. NATE has also endorsed Rep. McKinley's "Facilitating DIGITAL Applications Act," which would make it easier to develop and permit broadband infrastructure on federal property through online applications.

In addition, NATE supports Rep. McMorris Rodgers' "American Broadband Act," which would provide valuable funding for broadband buildouts and rural wireless infrastructure.

Other related bills of interest to us include the "Eliminate the Digital Divide Act," sponsored by Reps. Williams and Cooper (and by Sens. Cornyn and Manchin in the Senate), which would require the FCC to establish a program to provide funding to states for expanding access to broadband service in unserved areas; and the "American Broadband Buildout Act," sponsored by Sens. Collins and Rosen, which would provide funding to expand broadband Internet access in unserved areas.

In addition, the "Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act," introduced by Rep. Clyburn in the House and by Sen. Klobuchar in the Senate, would make high-speed broadband Internet service accessible and affordable to all Americans. Most of the funds authorized to help address the digital divide would be set aside for a new federal program to build out broadband infrastructure in areas where Americans lack speedy service.

The \$1.2 trillion infrastructure package also includes provisions which can address another of NATE's priorities, workforce development. These initiatives will help provide for a skilled communications workforce and ensure transparency and accountability of federally funded broadband projects.

As you no doubt have heard from other industries, our industry has a substantial workforce shortage. Late last year, NATE conducted a survey of our member companies to help us quantify the industry's workforce, its workforce needs and its workforce shortages. The survey revealed that NATE member companies could hire an additional 14,963 workers across 26 different industry positions to meet current and future demand related to next generation infrastructure and network deployment activities – and that is before the added responsibilities and demands that current congressional legislation might necessitate.

The significant shortage of a properly trained and qualified workforce jeopardizes the national communications goals of expanding broadband, enhancing broadcast services and closing the digital divide while improving public safety, promoting national security and maintaining existing communications and broadcast towers.

NATE strongly supports enactment of legislation that would authorize funding for the development of classroom and field-based curriculum and certificate programs at community colleges, vocational institutes and military organizations to attract and train a future pipeline of workers to build, deploy and maintain the communications infrastructure.

Workforce development and our substantial workforce shortage have taken on even greater urgency as a result of the pandemic which, as Chairman Pallone noted, has forced millions of Americans to work, study, utilize telehealth services and play remotely, thereby substantially increasing the nation's reliance on wireless infrastructure.

The infrastructure bill also includes another amendment we supported, which would require the FCC to provide maps of federally funded broadband projects.

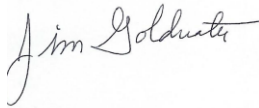
For the record, NATE advocates enactment of legislation that would: open up additional spectrum to the telecom industry, as more access to spectrum equates to more deployment opportunities for our members; promote spectrum planning and allocation; establish a reserve fund for some of the FCC's record-setting \$80+ billion C-band auction proceeds; and require the FCC to update the national broadband plan.

NATE subject matter experts are available to assist the subcommittee and the full committee as you develop and consider proposals affecting the telecom industry. We commend the Subcommittee for holding this week's hearing and its ongoing efforts to address the nation's communications networks and needs.

Sincerely,



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