

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Robert E. Latta
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Strengthening Our Communications Networks to Meet the
Needs of Consumers”
October 6, 2020**

As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing today. It has been nearly 100 days since this subcommittee has held a hearing, and I am glad we are back to discuss some important issues within the communications and technology jurisdiction.

For over a decade, expanding broadband access has been a shared, bipartisan goal. We have enacted landmark legislation to improve our broadband availability mapping tools, taken steps to streamline Federal broadband deployment, and worked together to ensure Americans did not lose service during the COVID-19 pandemic. And it was done with thoughtful input from Republicans and Democrats alike.

Yet on the cusp of a “once-in-a-generation investment” in broadband, as the President calls it, our

committee, and in particular this subcommittee, has been absent. We have held no hearings to examine the communications provisions included in the Senate infrastructure bill that is being discussed among House leadership. We have also held no markups to consider improvements, despite a partisan bill on today's hearing that aims to improve portions of the Senate bill.

In addition to the disappointment of not having input on the Senate infrastructure bill, we have not heard directly from the agencies on how they plan to implement this funding should Congress provide it to them. NTIA and the FCC, both agencies that this committee oversees, stand to receive tens of billions of dollars between the Senate infrastructure bill and the partisan Reconciliation bill, yet we have not had either agency before this committee to testify under this Administration.

We are missing an opportunity to deliver a truly, bipartisan success for the American people that reflects the expertise and experience of this Committee's members to close the digital divide once and for all.

So today, we will examine the missed opportunities of this Subcommittee and prepare for the hard work of understanding the shortcomings of the Senate infrastructure bill.

Earlier this year, Republicans introduced the Boosting Broadband Connectivity Agenda to help remove regulatory barriers to broadband deployment, and I am pleased to see four bills from that agenda on today's hearing. Mr. Curtis's Federal Broadband Deployment in Unserved Areas Act would map Federal facilities that can support broadband infrastructure in unserved areas. Mr. Duncan's Expediting Federal Broadband Deployment Reviews Act would help expedite and prioritize reviews for requests to deploy broadband on Federal land. Mr. Kinzinger's Wireless Resiliency and Flexible Investment Act would make it easier to invest in network resiliency. And Mr. Bucshon's Protecting Critical Infrastructure Act would establish a two-year prison term for anyone who maliciously destroys a communications facility. While it is disappointing that we are not considering all of the bills included in our package, this is a good first step.

I would be remiss if I did not also mention the other bills on today's hearing that, despite being historically bipartisan issues, have been unnecessarily injected with partisanship.

The Chairman's Spectrum Innovation Act takes meaningful steps to improve the auction of lower 3 gigahertz spectrum that was included in the Senate infrastructure bill. However, this bill did not have the opportunity to receive Republican input before it was stuffed into the partisan reconciliation tool as part of Democrats' \$3.5 trillion dollar tax and spending spree.

H.R. 5400 extends the Anti-Deficiency Act Exemption for the Universal Service Fund conveniently through the first term of the Biden Administration's FCC Chair, who remains unknown. Yet this subcommittee has not held an FCC oversight hearing after giving record level funding to the FCC through partisan reconciliation spending, with no confirmed Chair.

And then we have H.R. 4208, another attempt by Democrats to disregard the First Amendment, this time

telling broadcast stations what type of news programming to distribute.

Mr. Chairman, the breadth and significance of these bills demands much more than a last-minute legislative hearing, including additional hearings on the individual topics we are covering today. We have certainly had the time over the last several months to hold substantive hearings on the topics contemplated in this legislation. And I would urge you to do so before the Committee meets to consider reporting these bills to the floor.

Thank you, and I yield back.