

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Bob Latta
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology**

“Connecting America: Oversight of NTIA”

February 16, 2022

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Good morning, and welcome to the first oversight hearing held by the Communications and Technology Subcommittee this Congress. I'd like to start off by congratulating you, Assistant Secretary Davidson, on your confirmation to lead the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, and thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing.

The COVID-19 pandemic magnified the importance of Internet access as so much of our daily lives moved online. From telehealth to education, nearly every aspect of American life was forced online overnight, and unlike our international counterparts, our providers were well positioned to step up and make sure their networks successfully handled the spike in traffic.

Fortunately, the Trump Administration's Federal Communications Commission made great progress in connecting Americans across the country. Americans without access to broadband service fell by 14 percentage points in 2018, and Americans living in rural areas with access to broadband at 250 megabits per second increased by 85 percent since 2017. Yet despite this success, more work must be done to close digital divide in many of the hardest to reach parts of our country, including in my district.

By statute, NTIA is the President's principal advisor on all telecommunications and information policy and is responsible for representing the Executive Branch on both domestic and international communications policies. And with the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, NTIA is now at the forefront of expanding broadband connectivity across all of the United States.

NTIA received an unprecedented \$43 billion of dollars of funding for broadband deployment and over \$15 billion to promote digital equity and broadband affordability. This staggering investment must first prioritize hard to reach, unserved areas.

However, I am concerned that we are seeing this Administration move the goalpost by redefining what it means to be considered "served." By moving the goalposts and not having proper safeguards in place, we risk leaving Americans with no service further behind.

In addition to this funding, Republicans have outlined comprehensive broadband permitting reform legislation that would make it easier to deploy broadband on Federal lands and hard to reach areas. As the Assistant Secretary, you have discretion over how these funds are spent, and I encourage you to keep these concerns in mind as you draft the rules.

NTIA is also the manager of all federal spectrum. Federal agencies rely on spectrum for mission critical systems, but they must also be held accountable for efficiently using their spectrum resources. Additionally, as more Americans rely on wireless devices and the growth of the Internet of Things, making spectrum available for commercial use is

necessary for America to lead in future generations of technology. NTIA has the distinct role of balancing both interests and representing the voices of all federal agencies on spectrum matters.

This is not an easy task. We continue to see federal agencies circumvent NTIA in the spectrum management process or ignore changes in the spectrum landscape. More frequently, we see these technical spectrum disputes spilling out into the public. The most recent example is with the FCC's C-Band order. Rather than engage with expert engineers at the NTIA and FCC, and participate in the FCC's public and transparent process, the aviation industry and the FAA engaged in fearmongering tactics by going to the press and threatening to ground planes. As the commercial spectrum landscape continues to evolve with advances in new technologies, NTIA is at the center of preserving Federal missions and ensuring Federal users are prepared for new developments in the spectrum landscape.

It is our responsibility as members on the Energy and Commerce committee to oversee NTIA's implementation of these diverse and important tasks, and provide necessary direction when challenges arise. Today's hearing is a great start to what I hope is the first of many oversight hearings on these important topics.

I yield back.