

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Connecting America: Oversight of the FCC.”
March 31, 2022
(As Prepared for Delivery)**

Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I’d like to congratulate you, Chairwoman Rosenworcel, on your confirmation to lead the Federal Communications Commission. And you, Commissioner Simington, on your first appearance as FCC Commissioner before the Energy and Commerce Committee.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic put an unprecedented demand on our communications networks. Overnight, Americans’ lives transitioned online for work, school, and to stay connected to family and friends.

Thanks to the great work and private investment of U.S. communications providers, our networks withstood this stress test. Since 2017, broadband providers invested more than \$300 billion into expanding and upgrading our networks.

Since 2015, broadband speeds for the most popular service tier have more than doubled, and according to the

most recent FCC data, the digital divide closed by 14 percent between the end of 2016 and the end of 2019.

At the same time, the price of service decreased. Companies continue to offer discounted plans for low-income Americans at speeds fast enough to support streaming and working from home.

And when the cost of virtually everything is skyrocketing because of inflation, the inflation-adjusted cost of broadband service has decreased by 34 percent since 2015.

American Rescue Plan/IIJA Programs

On top of this private-sector response, Congress acted to help connect Americans. Congress provided the FCC 450 million dollars to expand networks and provide devices to enable telehealth services and established the 3.2 billion dollar Emergency Broadband Benefit to keep low-income Americans struggling due to the pandemic connected.

The infrastructure bill then extended the duration of this program, known as the Affordable Connectivity Program, and provided the FCC with an additional 14.2 billion dollars to subsidize broadband service.

Combined with the reduced offerings by the private sector, broadband service is free for many low-income Americans.

At a time when many people lost their jobs and were stuck at home, these bipartisan programs provided necessary relief to make sure they could stay connected during the pandemic.

Now, we must make sure that these funds are not subject to waste, fraud, and abuse and get Americans back to work and off of these temporary, COVID-era government subsidy programs.

Remove Red Tape

The success of our broadband performance, deployment, and affordability is largely due to the actions taken by the Trump Administration and Republican FCC to roll back regulations.

In 2017, then-FCC Chairman Pai rescinded the strict net neutrality regulations that were enacted during the Obama Administration, which promoted investment in our broadband networks.

It allowed our networks in the United States to withstand the COVID-19 stress test while our allies in Europe

struggled to keep up due to their burdensome net neutrality regulations which the Democrats continue to advocate for here.

Rather than expanding government command and control into the broadband marketplace, let's learn from this pandemic and continue on the path of deregulation.

We should not ignore the success that private sector innovation yielded and revert to heavy handed regulations.

Innovation

We have the opportunity to work together on ways to promote innovation and U.S. leadership in technology. I am excited to be working with Chairman Pallone on my legislative discussion draft, the Satellite and Telecommunications Streamlining Act.

It updates and streamlines the FCC's satellite licensing rules to encourage satellite investment in the United States. Satellite technology is a viable solution to providing connectivity in hard-to-reach areas with speeds Americans need.

Let's encourage this and more innovation, and make sure our policies and regulations keep pace.

Broadband Mapping/Interagency Coordination

The FCC is at the forefront of making sure all Americans are connected. Congress tasked the FCC with updating its broadband maps to accurately reflect where broadband exists in the United States and where it does not.

Without these maps, and without removing regulatory and other barriers to deployment, the 45 billion dollars that Congress appropriated for broadband deployment can be wasted.

We cannot let that happen. It is crucial that the FCC complete the maps as soon as possible and share that data with the agencies that were awarded broadband funds

We need to make sure that money gets where it needs to go and we need to make sure recipients can deploy quickly and efficiently once they get it.

All agencies awarding broadband funding should use these maps, so we get this right. I look forward to the discussion today on these important topics and hope we can continue to work together going forward.

I yield back.