

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Communications and Technology Subcommittee Hearing on “Launching Into the State of the Satellite Marketplace.”

February 2, 2023

This Committee has a long tradition of working in a bipartisan fashion to enhance technological innovation in this country, and this hearing marks the start of another endeavor. Today, we begin exploring the next frontier of the commercial space industry.

Our Committee can and should play an important role in shaping how the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates and licenses this sector and the airwaves satellites use.

I also want to commend Chairwoman Rosenworcel and her fellow Commissioners for recognizing the changing dynamics in the satellite industry and the need for the FCC to keep up with the times. Their recent unanimous order adopting Chairwoman Rosenworcel’s proposal to create a Space Bureau is an important step in the right direction and reflects the increasing importance of this industry in our communications marketplace.

In the last few years, we have seen significant advancements in the ability of satellites to provide broadband internet and other critical services to consumers throughout the country and the world. While this is beneficial for many reasons, it is especially helpful to those living in areas where other types of technologies haven’t been built yet to reach consumers due to geographic considerations and other factors.

Congress took a historic step forward last year by making a \$65 billion investment in broadband connectivity as part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. As a result of this new law, Americans across the nation who have lacked connectivity will finally be connected to high-speed, reliable, and affordable broadband. This will make a huge difference for communities all across the nation that have been left behind for far too long. Satellites will also continue to play a role in competing with and enhancing the redundancy of terrestrial networks, including by expanding the coverage of mobile service.

I actually expect the consumer use of satellites to grow in the future, as wireless carriers and phone manufacturers continue to build this capability into their networks and phones. Fortunately, with this technology, mobile consumers can rest assured that if they find themselves in an area without service — whether it is because of a lack of coverage, the result of natural disaster, or some other reason — they will continue to have the ability to reach first responders and loved ones during their time of need.

This additional layer of protection is a welcome sign given that the climate crisis is causing more frequent and more severe disasters. Mobile service is essential to receive emergency alerts with lifesaving information. In fact, a recent article detailed the devastating consequences that local communities and individual neighborhoods face when they lack access to mobile service in times of tragedy. These examples and so many others demonstrate that a resilient communications network can be the difference between life and death when the unexpected strikes. And satellite systems will be crucial in helping consumers navigate through these challenging moments.

The stakes could not be higher for the American satellite marketplace. Other countries, including our foreign adversaries, are making aggressive moves to dominate this industry. Quite simply, failing to ensure that the United States remains a market leader in this sector risks our nation falling behind our counterparts across the globe, including China, in producing cutting-edge consumer innovations and fortifying our public safety and national security capabilities.

It is also imperative that we protect the satellite marketplace and its relevant supply chains from threats by non-trusted actors. We cannot risk having our satellite networks face the same challenges we have seen in some of our other communications networks, especially given the global nature of their operation.

Therefore, it is important that we better understand this marketplace so that we make sure that the American public benefits from these technological advancements in a safe and secure manner. And since satellite innovation is happening as we speak, we must begin examining this industry now so that the United States can prepare for the satellite technologies of today and tomorrow.

It is clear we have a lot to discuss this morning as we explore the growing satellite marketplace. I welcome our panelists and look forward to hearing from them. And I yield back the balance of my time.