

**Opening Statement of Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Breaking Barriers: Streamlining Permitting to Expedite
Broadband Deployment
April 19, 2023**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Good morning, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

IIJA Funding

In 2021, Congress wrote the largest check for broadband deployment in our nation's history.

More than \$42 billion dollars for the Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment, or BEAD, Program...

... \$1 billion for middle mile infrastructure deployment...

...an additional \$2 billion for deployment on Tribal lands...

...and \$2 billion for rural broadband deployment through the Department of Agriculture.

These funds are just a small fraction of the funding appropriated over the past several years that could be used for deploying broadband.

This is a historical opportunity in our nation's history to connect all Americans – and we cannot allow permitting delays and unnecessary costs to mess it up.

Permitting Reform

Unfortunately, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act spent more money without the needed fixes to the burdensome permitting process.

We need to lift these regulatory burdens, cut the red tape, and roll out the red carpet.

Without removing barriers to deployment, a record amount of taxpayer money will be wasted.

This means that rural Americans will continue to watch from a distance as technologies advance.

Kids will continue to go without access to online educational resources...

...and business in rural America will be left behind as the digital economy continues to boom in urban centers across the globe.

Call to Action

This issue should not be partisan.

The federal funding wave is coming. The BEAD program will begin awarding money for deployment as early as the end of this year...

...in addition to the deployment that is already happening from both private and public investments.

It was good news last year that the National Telecommunication and Information Administration encouraged states to identify steps to “reduce costs and barriers to deployment...”

...promote the use of existing infrastructure...

...promote and adopt dig-once policies, streamlined permitting processes...

...and cost-effective access to poles, conduits, easements and rights of way.”

But encouraging and promoting these actions is not enough.

It's time for Congress to act and pass substantive permitting reform, like the legislative discussion drafts we are considering today.

The bills being discussed today offer a wide variety of needed improvements to existing permitting requirements at the federal, state, and local level.

I'm proud to lead the Wildfire Wireless Resiliency Act as part of this legislative agenda.

In the wake of a disaster, communities need to be re-connected as quickly as possible when their networks go down.

Communications providers working to reconnect victims to the systems that provide access to public safety, healthcare, and resources should not be tied up in regulatory nightmares.

Under this new legislation, projects to rebuild damaged or destroyed communications facilities would be exempt from NEPA and Historical Preservation review...

...which would have already occurred for the original communications facility to be built.

We don't need another round of environmental or historic review where there was already existing infrastructure.

And this bill is one of many we will discuss today that enacts reasonable permitting reforms.

Members across this committee are putting forth excellent solutions that guarantee these important federal funds are going towards the deployment that Congress intended ... and communities need.

Closing

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

To our rural and urban constituents currently under- and unserved...broadband is on its way.

I am hopeful that we can help it get to you faster and in a less-costly manner.

Thank you, and I yield back.