

**Opening Statement of Chairman Robert E. Latta**  
**Subcommittee on Communications and Technology**  
**“Breaking Barriers: Streamlining Permitting to Expedite**  
**Broadband Deployment”**  
**April 19, 2023**  
*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

Good morning, and welcome to today’s hearing.

Broadband connectivity is a critical part of everyday life. Ordinary activities like work, education, and healthcare now require a high-speed internet connection. Yet millions of Americans, particularly those in rural areas, still lack access to broadband and are unable to enjoy the benefits of connectivity.

Over the past few years, Congress has made significant investments to bridge this digital divide, the most significant being the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, providing over \$45 billion for broadband deployment. While funding is a key piece to the puzzle, it’s not enough to make sure

people have access to broadband. We need to make sure new networks can be built in **a timely and cost-efficient manner.**

I firmly believe that the infrastructure bill was a missed opportunity to enact meaningful permitting reform that would have broken down barriers to deployment and stretched federal funding. Lengthy application reviews and excessive fees for deployment will only delay connectivity and increase costs, leaving behind those American families who lack reliable internet access. **Without changes to the permitting process and meaningful oversight, all of this money set aside for broadband could be wasted.** We cannot let that happen.

Permitting reform is not just necessary to bridge the digital divide, it is necessary to help us continue to lead the world in next-generation wireless technology. We will not beat China to 5G leadership

if efforts to deploy new wireless infrastructure are delayed. I appreciate that the Federal Communications Commission has worked to streamline state and local permitting processes in this space. We need to codify and build on these reforms.

The legislation we are reviewing today includes over 30 proposals that will help us streamline permitting at all levels of government, facilitating accelerated broadband deployment. These ideas include implementing shot clocks on state and local government reviews of permitting applications, capping fees, removing burdensome environmental and historic preservation reviews, and making it easier to deploy on federal lands. Enacting these policies would help providers receive an answer in a timely manner, reduce the burdens and costs of deployment, and ensure that we connect people quickly.

I am proud to once again lead the WIRELESS Leadership Act, which would help expedite the deployment of wireless infrastructure. This legislation would set timelines that state and local governments must abide by in reviewing applications and create a deemed grant remedy for reviews that miss deadlines. It would also reduce the cost of deployment by limiting the fees those governments can charge for reviewing applications and using a right-of-way. The bill does all this while preserving state and local zoning authority.

I hope that we can make these bills bipartisan as we move through our regular order. **This is not a partisan issue: both Republicans and Democrats want to close the digital divide.** The bills we are considering today will ensure we do so quickly and cost-effectively. I am pleased that the Biden Administration recognizes the need for permitting reform and is encouraging states to streamline their

permitting processes for broadband deployment. I hope we can work on this package together.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, all of whom understand the challenges of deploying broadband. Thank you for appearing before us today.

I now yield to the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, the gentlelady from the Seventh District of California.