

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Communications & Technology Ranking Member Doris Matsui

Markup of 28 Bills, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology

May 17, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Latta.

The bipartisan items on the agenda today will speed broadband deployment and help bring connectivity to communities without it.

From the small hamlets in my district to the rest of the rural areas represented by the Members of this Subcommittee, those bills represent an important step forward.

I'm an original cosponsor of the DIGITAL Applications Act on the agenda today. This bill would take long-overdue action to establish online portals to accept, process, and grant applications for broadband deployment.

As we heard at the hearing on this bill, the current process for submitting and tracking the progress of applications is severely disjointed.

As the Wireless Infrastructure Association noted at our hearing, "measures that would direct federal agencies to develop online application portals have the potential to significantly expedite the permitting process."

So I'm glad to see the DIGITAL Applications Act moving forward. It'll provide much needed clarity and accountability for broadband deployments on federal lands.

But that's not the only bipartisan bill that will speed up broadband deployment.

We have bills that will expedite evaluation, standardize fees, and speed up permitting.

Representatives Palmer and Ryan's Standard FEES Act would establish a common fee for applications processing.

Representatives Duncan and Craig's Expediting Federal Broadband Deployment Act would establish an interagency strike force to prioritize broadband deployment on federal lands.

As we prepare for the distribution of BEAD funds, these bills will remove barriers and speed up deployments.

But, unfortunately, that's only part of the story.

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There are other bills on the agenda today that are partisan and counterproductive. They undermine local authority and limit, rather than support, local governments.

Draconian shot clocks coupled with deemed granted provisions set up under-resourced local governments to fail.

Instead of providing the resources our local partners need to meet demand, these bills limit their authority and restrict their processes.

So, while I'm glad we're making bipartisan progress, the Minority, and many of our local governments are concerned about the partisan bills moving forward today.

Despite that, I know there will be a continued need to focus on this issue.

So, I'm excited to have bipartisan bills to help close the digital divide and I'm committed to moving them to the floor quickly.

I also want to take a moment to acknowledge that this Subcommittee will also be considering another short-term extension of the FCC's auction authority.

As I said at our hearing the day after that authority lapsed, this was, and continues to be, a failure. Reinstating it is a national security and economic imperative.

With companies like T-Mobile ready to put 2.5 gigahertz licenses to use this rolling lapse is preventing companies from providing new broadband services to American consumers.

And, in the run up to the World Radio Conference it sends a dangerous message to the rest of the world about our ability to lead.

So this extension is a step in the right direction but without a willing partner in the Senate, it may not be enough.

Nevertheless, I'm glad our Subcommittee is moving forward. We need to keep trying.

With that, I look forward to discussion of these bills and I yield back the remainder of my time.