

**Opening Statement of Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission”
June 21, 2023**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Good morning, and thank you, Chairman Latta.

Welcome back, Chairwoman Rosenworcel, and Commissioners Carr, Starks, and Simington.

There is a lot on the agenda today.

Since the last time you were before this Committee in March of 2022, the FCC’s spectrum auction authority has expired for the first time ever.

The FCC stood up its Space Bureau and Office of International Affairs.

Multiple versions of new broadband maps have been released.

FCC Inspector General advisories have identified waste, fraud, and abuse in multi-billion-dollar programs that were created to keep Americans connected during COVID.

And... a major merger under review that cleared the Department of Justice languished for more than 400 days at the FCC.... a new record.

This merger review was denied by FCC bureau staff rather than considered at the full Commission level.

This is an unprecedented move by the Commission.

SPECTRUM

Your agency also plays a key role in managing our nation's airwaves, a vital task.

In order for the U.S. to lead in next generation technologies, the commercial industry must have access to spectrum.

This Committee has prioritized providing the FCC with the tools it needs to manage our nation's airwaves effectively.

Unfortunately, a key tool used by the FCC – the authority to issue spectrum licenses – expired earlier this year for the first time ever.

I have been working with my colleagues in the House for over a year, and with my colleagues in the Senate, to extend this authority.

Earlier this year, the Committee unanimously passed H.R. 3565, the Spectrum Auction Reauthorization Act, to extend the FCC's auction authority for 3 years...

...fund the shortfall in the rip-and-replace program...

...and support our first responders through upgraded 9-1-1 networks.

We're continuing to work on advancing this legislation out of the House, through the Senate, and to the President's desk to sign.

BROADBAND SPENDING

This Committee is also prioritizing closing the digital divide, and the FCC has a key role to play in this effort.

I am pleased that the commission has released two versions of its broadband maps since our last oversight hearing.

These maps are significantly better than previous FCC maps...

...and we need to make sure the FCC gets this right in order to ensure every person can participate in today's economy.

\$42 billion dollars has been allocated to this effort and we must be able to trust that these maps are correct--and that this money goes to unserved communities.

This money cannot be wasted, which we are unfortunately seeing within other FCC programs.

Since 2021, the FCC Inspector General has released two advisories warning of fraud in the Affordable Connectivity Program or ACP.

Congress provided over \$17 billion for this program to help low-income individuals afford broadband.

This fraud undermines confidence in the program and the FCC's ability to administer it.

This is especially concerning as Congress considers the future of the ACP.

MEDIA ISSUES

The FCC has also been active in the media marketplace.

In March 2022, Standard General announced its proposed acquisition of Tegna, which manages 64 TV stations in 51 U.S. markets.

The transaction passed review unchallenged by the Department of Justice.

Then, in an unprecedented manner, the FCC delegated the decision to the media bureau...

...which was directed to punt this decision to an Administrative Law Judge.

It takes the Administrative Law Judge an average of 799 days to complete the hearing process.

Delegating this decision to an Administrative Law Judge hearing effectively kills this deal.

You all are confirmed by the Senate to take votes on these types of decisions.

The Chair's decision to delegate this matter to career officials is a dereliction of her duties.

Closing

This oversight hearing of the Commission reaffirms our commitment to ensuring agencies under the jurisdiction of this Committee are held accountable...

...use the resources allocated to them responsibly, and do not stray from their mission.

Chairwoman Rosenworcel, and Commissioners Carr, Starks, and Simington, thank you for being here.

I look forward to our discussion.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.