

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

Hearing on “Leveraging AI to Enhance American Communications”

November 14, 2023

Today, the Committee continues exploring the potential benefits and harms of artificial intelligence (AI) by discussing how we can leverage the power of AI to improve communications networks.

AI has the potential to transform how these networks can better serve the public. For instance, AI may be able to detect deepfake voices and scam calls, which will help to quickly protect consumers from annoying and illegal robocalls. AI models can be deployed in communications networks to help enhance resiliency and reliability, so that when natural disasters hit, providers can more easily assess damage and get these crucial networks back up and running. And AI may be able to optimize government and non-government use of spectrum so that this limited natural resource is used more efficiently for wireless and satellite connectivity.

Given the opportunities AI offers, I am pleased that the Biden Administration has taken action to examine the possibilities and risks of this technology. Last month, President Biden signed an executive order to adopt a coordinated, government-wide approach for the development and use of AI. The order directs the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to consider the benefits and risks of open-source AI systems. These systems can drive innovation by placing AI tools in the hands of consumers and researchers but are also susceptible to misuse and harm.

The Administration’s order also encourages the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to explore how AI can improve network security, resiliency, and interoperability, as well as combat unwanted robocalls and robotexts. Fortunately, the FCC has already started investigating how AI can be used to optimize communications networks, improve spectrum sharing, and develop more sophisticated models of 5G and 6G wireless signals. And tomorrow, the FCC will vote on a proposal to examine how AI technology can bolster the agency’s existing efforts to protect consumers from unwanted and dangerous robocalls and robotexts. I commend the Commission for exploring these issues, and hope Congress continues to support these efforts by fully funding our federal agencies so they can advance this important work.

Despite the promises of AI, we must also acknowledge its potential pitfalls. There is no question that this technology poses real risks to consumers, especially as it becomes more embedded in our daily lives and our communications networks.

We have already seen AI technology being used to mimic the voices of family members to scam Americans out of their life savings. Bias in the data used to train AI facial recognition software can contribute to wrongful and discriminatory arrests. And chatbots have been reported to leak personal data and spread disinformation.

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These risks demonstrate why it is so important that Congress and regulators fully understand how AI models are being developed, trained, and operated. Only then can we ensure proper measures are in place to mitigate any harm and produce critical accountability.

I strongly believe that as a bedrock of any AI regulation, we must enact strong federal data privacy protections for all consumers. AI cannot function without large quantities of data, and we must ensure that this increased data demand does not come at the expense of consumers' right to privacy.

Last Congress, Chair Rodgers and I worked together with our Committee to advance data privacy legislation with strong provisions focused on data minimization and algorithmic accountability. As AI becomes further integrated into American life, we must protect consumers from predatory data collection, and I remain committed to work to enact strong, bipartisan privacy protections. It is the only way we can limit the aggressive and abusive data collection practices of Big Tech and data brokers, ensure our children's sensitive information is protected online, protect against algorithmic bias, and put consumers back in control of their data.

I am looking forward to hearing from our witnesses about the challenges and opportunities of integrating AI technologies into our communications networks, and I yield back the remainder of my time.