

**Opening Statement of Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Strengthening American Communications Leadership with Open
Radio Access Networks”
January 17, 2024**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, and thank you, Chairman Latta.

America’s ability to win the future requires strong communications networks and the ability to lead the development of next generation wireless technologies.

Fifth generation wireless technology, or 5G, is already making our networks faster, more powerful, and fueling innovation that is helping connect millions of Americans and devices.

The next iteration, 6G, is still being developed, but promises to do even more.

As these technologies become more integrated into our daily lives, we need to ensure that they are safe and secure.

During last week’s hearing on cybersecurity, we discussed how foreign actors are increasingly exploiting vulnerabilities in our communications infrastructure, in order to carry out espionage, cyberattacks, and other activities that compromise our economic and national security.

We must safeguard our networks from these bad actors.

This requires making sure providers have the resources they need to remove technology sourced from adversarial countries, like China.

Of equal importance is supporting the development of Open Radio Access Networks, or Open RAN...

...which will help increase competition in the equipment vendor marketplace, leading to greater choice and lower costs for consumers.

NETWORK SECURITY

Countries like China have amassed a significant share of the global communications equipment industry...

...and are leveraging this dominance to flood the market—including in the U.S.—with cheaper and less secure alternatives.

That includes equipment from companies like Huawei and ZTE—which are controlled by the Chinese Communist Party.

Relying on this technology comes with significant risk.

It could be used by the CCP to surveil Americans, steal people's personal information, and even shut down entire networks.

Homes, schools, hospitals, our financial system, and the military are all in jeopardy as long as this equipment remains part of our communications infrastructure.

That's why Congress enacted the Secured and Trusted Communications Networks Act in 2020 to remove it entirely.

But that's just the first step.

The U.S. also needs trusted alternatives to replace this technology and compete with companies like Huawei and ZTE.

AMERICAN LEADERSHIP IN OPEN RAN

That's where Open RAN comes in.

Open RAN enables wireless networks to be inter-operable, meaning that operators are no longer forced to rely on a single end-to-end vendor.

This allows them the ability to mix-and-match equipment and services from different vendors, providing new opportunities for trusted companies to compete.

With more trusted suppliers offering affordable alternatives, operators will be able to end their reliance on companies with ties to the CCP.

Trusted operators around the world and in the United States have already begun deploying fully open 5G networks.

It's important that we continue to build on this momentum and Open RAN is critical to achieving that goal.

PUBLIC WIRELESS SUPPLY CHAIN INNOVATION FUND

One way to help spur the development of a robust domestic Open RAN supply chain is through federal investment.

That is why Congress created the Public Wireless Supply Chain Innovation Fund.

To date, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), which administers this Fund, has

distributed less than 100 million dollars of the 1.5 billion dollars Congress provided.

It is also concerning that only in the last round of awards did NTIA finally provide grants to help with the deployment of Open RAN.

Given how long NTIA is taking to make these awards, and the types of projects NTIA is choosing to fund...

...I am concerned we could miss the window to make the meaningful investments necessary to support widespread deployment of Open RAN and secure our networks.

The Innovation Fund is an important tool to help the U.S. cement our leadership in this technology and we cannot afford to jeopardize our competitive edge.

I hope that NTIA prioritizes Open RAN deployment projects as it continues awarding these grants.

CONCLUSION

Network security and American communications leadership are top priorities for this Committee, and promoting Open RAN is key to achieving both.

Our job in Congress is to make sure that we are providing industry with the tools it needs to ensure widespread development and deployment of this technology.

I thank our witnesses for being here and look forward to discussing these important issues.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.