

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

*Hearing on “Strengthening American Communications Leadership with Open Radio
Access Networks”*

January 17, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Latta.

This hearing comes at an excellent time. Industry is making important steps toward more open architecture and NTIA is making significant announcements in the Wireless Innovation Fund.

While momentum is on our side, it’s important to remember where we started and how far we’ve come.

For years, the United States has lacked a major telecommunications equipment manufacturer. Not unlike the decline in the semiconductor industry, the consequences of this weakness were brought into stark relief due to supply chain shortages and shifting geopolitics.

While the heavily consolidated equipment market has continued to meet the needs of operators, it’s clear additional diversity can support a more nimble supply chain while creating lasting economic opportunities here in the United States.

As networks migrate toward open, virtual, software defined technologies, there will be new opportunities for companies to enter the market and compete. By leveraging our existing advantages in high-value software and sophisticated workforce, America is uniquely positioned to capitalize on this evolution.

That’s why, back in 2020, I joined Chairman Pallone, then-Ranking Member Walden and Congressman Guthrie to introduce the USA Telecommunications Act to support the development and deployment of open, interoperable equipment.

It was our bipartisan, bicameral bill that eventually formed the foundation of the Public Wireless Supply Chain Innovation Fund included in the CHIPS and Science Act.

But this provision’s inclusion took work. In May of 2020, I sent a letter signed by a bipartisan group of 38 members calling for full funding of the USA Telecommunications Act. This show of bipartisan support was instrumental in our push to include this funding in the CHIPS & Science Act.

As the House Democrat lead on the CHIPS Act, I can say with certainty the CHIPS and Science Act represents one of the most important investments in American economic competitiveness we’ve seen in generations.

Thankfully, NTIA is working to get this money out the door and into the ecosystem with maximum impact.

By focusing on development, testing, and evaluation in the first NOFO, I believe the agency appropriately directed resources to the areas that will have the biggest catalyzing impact on the market.

Rather than funding limited buildouts that are unlikely to have broader market impact, testing and evaluation will open doors for small businesses to compete. And this is ultimately what we're looking for: new market entrants advancing open, interoperable solutions.

The NTIA is also doing work to support baseline specifications for the Open RAN ecosystem.

Developing a consensus "Minimum Viable Profile" could serve as a turnkey for additional investment and adoption of Open RAN. But, for these specifications to be adopted, it's imperative that there's faith not just in the product but the process.

A transparent, inclusive process will promote the type of consensus specifications needed for a true multi-vendor solution.

And, NTIA-led work will also ensure the specifications developed are free from the influence of untrusted vendors like Huawei. As we work to finish our rip and replace work, we should be minimizing the reach of these companies in the burgeoning Open RAN ecosystem.

As the Open RAN market continues to mature, we'll have more trusted vendors supplying new options for providers. And, by extension, a more resilient supply chain.

Thankfully, operators are stepping up to the plate to push the Open RAN market forward – DISH is deploying the world's first standalone Open RAN 5G network, Vodafone is making aggressive buildout commitments, and Japanese mobile operators are proving the technology in the field.

For America to keep pace, we must leverage the Wireless Innovation Fund to open doors for new innovators.

That's why today's hearing is so important. I'm excited to hear from our witnesses and with that, I yield the balance of my time.