

**Opening Statement Chairman Bob Latta**  
**Subcommittee on Communications and Technology**  
**“Oversight of the National Telecommunications and Information**  
**Administration”**  
**May 15, 2024**

Good morning, and welcome back to the subcommittee, Assistant Secretary Davidson. Thank you for appearing before us today. I look forward to the discussion.

Today, members of this committee expect an update on American’s largest investment to bridge the digital divide: the BEAD program. This \$42.45 billion dollar fund is statutorily obligated to connect unserved and underserved Americans to reliable broadband Internet so that they can reap the benefits that come with connectivity.

Since we last spoke, states submitted their initial proposals for this funding. Louisiana, the first state to submit their Volume II application, celebrated the approval of their initial proposal on December 15, 2023. Now, over four months later, NTIA has only approved the Volume II applications for three additional states: Kansas, Nevada, and West

Virginia. I hope NTIA will not miss the statutory timeline for this program. It is essential for you to work diligently to keep this program on track to close the digital divide.

While it is important to have reasonable processing timelines for this program, ensuring that BEAD is a program that broadband providers will be willing to participate in is also essential.

In February, the Department of Commerce Office of the Inspector General echoed the sentiment that Republicans have stated since the passage of the Infrastructure law: **the BEAD program must be technology neutral to fit the broadband needs of the different states and territories.** The OIG warned that NTIA must relax the fiber preference and Extremely High-Cost threshold to take into consideration the limited availability of resources to support a fiber preference. Ignoring innovations in unlicensed fixed wireless and satellite technologies will make the BEAD program a “deploy as much fiber as possible” program instead of the “connect every American” program that Congress directed.

In addition, members of this committee have expressed concern about NTIA forcing states to regulate broadband rates, imposing burdensome labor requirements, and ignoring other congressional directives. Now that OIG has confirmed our earlier fears, we hope you will finally listen to the other concerns we have raised.

I expect that we will hear today from the Assistant Secretary and my Democrat colleagues about the need to provide funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). I will just note that the Senate is controlled by your party and has yet to send a solution to the House. We have also not been asked to work on reforms to the program that would earn our support to fund. However, I am actively participating in the bipartisan, bicameral USF Working Group, which is working on a long term, sustainable solution to ensuring that the Affordable Connectivity Program is sustainable long term, and I would encourage all of my colleagues to support that effort.

Broadband is only one facet of our conversation today. NTIA's work spans from leading the

executive branch in studies on federal spectrum use, reports on artificial intelligence and quantum computing, to spurring innovation in public safety and open radio access networks.

As NTIA's mission continues to expand, it is important Congress' intent for the agency remains clear. Reauthorizing the NTIA is still a top priority for this committee, and I look forward to my bill with the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee being considered by the full House this week that will do just that. It has now been over 30 years since NTIA was last authorized. It is our duty to provide direction to the executive branch agencies within our jurisdiction and this committee takes that role seriously. We must move H.R. 4510, the NTIA Reauthorization Act through the Senate and to the Presidents desk.

I must note I was disappointed, following our December oversight hearing, that we did not receive answers in the 30 days we requested on the additional questions we sent you, and instead, got a response months later on April 19<sup>th</sup>. This delay is unacceptable. As Members of Congress, and your

oversight committee, you have a responsibility to respond to inquiries in a timely manner. Following this hearing, we expect prompt responses to our questions.

I now recognize the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, the gentlelady from the Seventh District of California.