

**Written Statement of
Alan Davidson
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce**

**Before the House Committee on Energy & Commerce
Subcommittee on Communications & Technology**

**“The Fiscal Year 2025 National Telecommunications and Information Administration
Budget”**

May 15, 2024

Chairman Latta, Chair Rodgers, Ranking Member Matsui, Ranking Member Pallone, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Since I last appeared before you in December, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has made great strides in pursuit of the key bipartisan initiatives that Congress tasked to us, including:

1. Connecting everyone in America to affordable, reliable high-speed Internet service, no matter where they live;
2. Maintaining American leadership in wireless innovation; and
3. Developing policies that will make for a better Internet – one that offers privacy, security, openness, trust, and safety.

Internet for All

This week marks two years since NTIA launched the Internet for All initiative. Today we are administering six major grant programs addressing the barriers that have kept too many Americans from fully participating in life online. I am happy to report that, across all six programs, we are hitting our marks and making progress on our goal of connecting everyone in America by the end of this decade.

Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program

As 2023 came to a close, we reached an important milestone in our Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program: All 56 states and territories submitted Initial Proposals for how they plan to spend their share of the \$42 billion state grant program.

In the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Congress prioritized the planning and preparation that has characterized these first two years. Now, 2024 is a year of execution—the year for which we’ve been planning. As NTIA approves initial plans, states and territories will be embarking on the challenge and subgrantee selection processes that will fund providers to build networks.

Digital Equity

We have also reached significant milestones in our Digital Equity Act programs. As of February 29, each state in America, along with DC and Puerto Rico, adopted a plan to ensure that all people have the skills, technology, and capacity to reap the full benefits of our digital economy.

In March, NTIA launched the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant funding notice, which makes more than \$800 million available for states and territories to execute on those plans—the largest-ever investment toward this national goal.

Other Internet for All Programs

In our other programs, NTIA is already connecting people across America.

- Our Broadband Infrastructure Program has deployed high-speed Internet service to nearly 33,000 previously unserved homes.
- Grants from our Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program have provided more than 25,000 connected devices to students and community members through Minority Serving Institutions, yielded 9,000 new broadband subscriptions, and trained more than 15,000 people in digital skills. Those numbers will continue to grow.
- Middle Mile grantees have begun breaking ground on new regional networks that serve as the “interstate highway systems” bringing high-speed data capacity to communities.
- And our Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program has so far distributed more than 5,000 connected devices and deployed networks to 18,000 historically hard-to-reach Tribal homes in just over two years. Demand remains high in Indian Country: our second funding notice for almost \$1 billion was nearly three times oversubscribed.

Permitting

Obtaining the necessary permits to construct broadband networks has long been a pain point in the deployment process. At NTIA, we are doing everything we can to help—from working with federal land management and historical preservation agencies to streamline the process for building on government land, to developing a new mapping tool to help grantees identify permit requirements early in project planning.

Affordability

Affordability remains a key goal across our Internet for All programs, and it is a goal that Congress can help us achieve. The Affordable Connectivity Program has helped more than 23 million households subscribe to free or discounted Internet service—more than 1 in 6 households across the country.

Affordable connectivity plays an important role in the success of the Internet for All deployment programs. We know that an Internet connection is not enough if a family cannot afford it. We also know that ACP helped network providers make the business case to serve rural and remote communities. Congress should act to ensure that more than 23 million Americans can continue to stay connected.

NTIA will continue to ensure networks are affordable, including through low-cost options required by the BEAD Program, reducing last-mile costs through our Middle Mile program, and distributing low or no-cost devices through our Tribal and Connecting Minority Communities Programs.

Spectrum

In November 2023, the Administration released the National Spectrum Strategy, which puts forward a whole-of-government approach to managing this vital resource. The Strategy offers more certainty to industry and agencies, supports innovation, and positions the United States to lead the way internationally.

Now NTIA and agencies are executing on that strategy. With a detailed Implementation Plan released in March, NTIA and the Department of Defense are already poised to launch a co-led study on the lower 3 GHz as we stand up studies in 7/8 GHz and Lower 37 GHz with our federal partners. We are also working closely with the Department of Defense and the National Science Foundation to develop Dynamic Spectrum Sharing pilots that will explore how advanced technologies can promote sharing by federal and non-federal users.

NTIA's Institute for Telecommunication Sciences will play a critical role in our spectrum future. Our colleagues in Colorado continue to perform exceptional work—from award-winning spectrum research to interagency collaborations like the 5G Challenge to advancing cutting-edge technology like computer vision—and they stand ready to assist.

Congress can aid efforts to meet spectrum demand by re-establishing the Federal Communications Commission's important authority to auction spectrum and by considering reforms to enhance our nation's spectrum capabilities and pipeline.

Internet Policy

Our work on broadband and spectrum both lead toward a future in which everyone in America can connect to the Internet. NTIA also continues to work on policy initiatives to ensure they are accessing a free and open Internet and can do so safely and securely.

AI

The Administration continues to engage in a whole-of-government approach to promoting the opportunities and addressing the risks of new AI systems. In March, NTIA released a significant report on AI accountability. It calls for:

- improved transparency into AI systems,
- independent evaluations to verify the claims made about these systems, and
- consequences for imposing unacceptable risks or making unfounded claims.

Our policy recommendations will help AI system developers and deployers show that their systems work as intended and can be trusted not to cause harm. Such assurance will in turn boost public—and marketplace—confidence in these tools.

Meanwhile, we continue working on a key assignment from President Biden’s executive order on AI: assessing the benefits and harms of advanced AI models with widely available model weights, the core component of AI systems. Our Request for Comment in this proceeding attracted significant public interest, and our team is on track to deliver a report to the White House in July.

Kids Online Health and Safety

We continue to co-lead the President’s Task Force on Kids Online Health and Safety, alongside the Department of Health and Human Services. The Task Force is examining how government, industry, educators, and caregivers can better protect the health and safety of youth online. This spring, the Task Force will develop voluntary guidance, policy recommendations, a research agenda, and a toolkit on safety-, health- and privacy-by-design for industry.

Privacy

A comprehensive federal privacy law would aid our work in these areas and many others. The President has called for greater privacy protections for all Americans. I want to commend Chair Rodgers, Ranking Member Pallone, and others on this committee for your leadership and commitment to protecting the privacy of all Americans.

Trusted Networks and Public Safety

NTIA continues to work to ensure that our wireless networks are secure—and that they can be deployed to keep Americans safe.

Innovation Fund and Supplier Diversity

NTIA’s Wireless Innovation Fund made its final awards from its first funding notice earlier this year, totaling \$140 million. These first awards focused on testing and R&D infrastructure—areas that stakeholders told us should be our first priority.

Just this month, NTIA released a second NOFO focused on bolstering the supply chain and supporting the development of interoperable 5G equipment. We’re making up to \$420 million available for these critical investments.

And as we work to promote investment in supplier diversity at home, we are also advancing trusted and resilient networks internationally. In concert with other federal agencies, NTIA has put forth technical Open RAN standards—developed by the private sector here in the United States—for adoption around the world. And we have earned commitments from multiple allies to invest in R&D, adopt incentives, and enact policies to support Open RAN.

FirstNet

Our colleagues at the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) have been busy both building and expanding this network as well as providing support to the men and women who keep America safe. FirstNet recently reached almost 5.9 million connections and serves 28,000 public safety agencies and organizations. Now that the initial network build is complete, earlier this year FirstNet announced a massive \$8 billion investment over the next decade to bring enhanced communications capabilities to our first responders.

When major events happen, FirstNet is on the scene. We've seen them in disaster response mode, as we did when FirstNet supported wildfire suppression in Maui, Colorado, and Texas. What often goes unnoticed is their help preparing first responders for major planned events: for example, in Las Vegas this winter FirstNet scoured the Raiders' stadium for dead zones to ensure constant communications during the Super Bowl.

NTIA continues to support deployment of Next-Generation 911 (NG911) services nationwide. Our public safety telecommunicators should have the same communications capabilities that all of us carry in our pockets each day. I appreciate this committee's recognition of the importance of NG911 and look forward to working with you to advance this critical initiative.

Reauthorization

Congress has entrusted NTIA with an ambitious agenda: to bring Internet service to everyone; support U.S. leadership and competitiveness in wireless innovation and networks; ensure the private sector has adequate spectrum access consistent with the needs and missions of federal agencies; and develop policies to support privacy, security, openness, and trust. However, despite fundamental changes in the communications landscape and Congress entrusting NTIA with an increasing number of responsibilities, NTIA has not been reauthorized in more than 30 years. We welcome the opportunity to work with Congress to update NTIA's existing authority as well as to augment that authority to better reflect the agency's role on issues central to the modern digital economy.

Conclusion

NTIA's work is about more than technology and communications policy. We are building a better-connected world. We are working to create new jobs and economic opportunity, to build a fairer and more equitable society, and to stay competitive globally. I look forward to working with this Subcommittee to continue to deliver on this mission for the American people.

Thank you for inviting me to appear today, and I welcome your questions.