

Opening Statement
Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology Hearing:
“From Introduction to Implementation: A BEAD Program
Progress Report”
September 10, 2024

Good morning, and thank you, Chair Latta.

Broadband connectivity is critical to our everyday life and winning the future...its what connects our work, schools, businesses, hospitals, and more.

Broadband helps create opportunity...opportunity to spur growth, learn, and foster relationships...an opportunity that many rural Americans have lacked for far too long.

Today’s hearing is part of the Energy and Commerce Committee’s continued efforts to close the digital divide through the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program, or BEAD.

In this Congress alone, we’ve heard from NTIA Assistant Secretary Alan Davidson three times...

...advanced major legislation that would address barriers to broadband permitting . . .

. . . and recently, opened an investigation into NTIA’s lack of transparency and unlawful actions in implementing the BEAD program.

Concerns with NTIA’s Administration of BEAD

Republicans on this Committee have been vocal about our concern that NTIA's self-imposed guidelines for BEAD will undermine the program's success...

...leading to wasted tax dollars while leaving Americans without the broadband access they need to succeed in their everyday life.

Unfortunately, NTIA has only furthered our concerns by taking actions that will lead to increased costs and longer timelines for broadband deployment.

NTIA's decision to pressure states to regulate the rates charged for broadband service—despite the law strictly prohibiting rate regulation—will make this program less attractive to the providers needed to participate for BEAD's success.

NTIA is also using the program to push a radical agenda with unnecessary workforce and climate-related requirements which will make this program more expensive to operate...

...diverting important dollars that should be used to connect more Americans.

NTIA has spent two years pushing an expensive fiber-first agenda...violating the law's requirement to use a technology-neutral approach...

...and making deployment cost prohibitive in many unserved communities, especially in areas like those in parts of my district in Eastern Washington.

NTIA, to its credit, seems to finally be showing an openness to alternative technologies like unlicensed fixed wireless and low

Earth-orbit satellite, something that Republicans have asked for since this program began...

...but by failing to do this from the beginning they have wasted time and money, which only results in fewer Americans getting connected.

Delays, Delays, Delays

While the statute laid out certain timing requirements for the BEAD program, I continue to hear about unnecessary delays in NTIA's approval process.

Burdensome red tape that NTIA added to the program has made compliance by states much more difficult.

It has been nearly 14 months since states received their initial allocations from NTIA, yet the administration still has not approved 16 initial state proposals.

Vice President Harris was tasked by President Biden to be the Broadband Czar, which has resulted in little progress and heavy-handed federal bureaucracy.

That's why we are having today's hearing...to hear from those on the ground, the states and providers, and understand how Congress can ensure this program achieves its goal of connecting every American.

Closing

Today is the first time we've had representatives from the states and providers, those who will actually make the goals of BEAD a reality, before the Committee since the program was created...

...and I am excited to hear from our expert witnesses about their experience so far and to discuss what still needs to be done to ensure we are successful in achieving our mission.

Everyone here today wants BEAD to succeed...which is why Congressional oversight of the program is critical.

Our mission remains that every American be connected...and we will stay vigilant in fulfilling that commitment to the American people.

I yield back.