

**Committee on Energy and Commerce**  
**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery**  
**of**  
**Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.**

***Hearing on “Strengthening American Leadership in Wireless Technology”***

January 23, 2025

We are here today to discuss spectrum, one of our nation’s most underrated and economically valuable natural resources. Discussion of current spectrum policy debates is important to better understand how our decisions impact America’s standing in the world. But we cannot ignore that this hearing comes at a time when House Republicans are considering using spectrum auction proceeds as a piggybank to fund their costly tax breaks for billionaires and large wealthy corporations. I hope they reconsider going down this road because it would be a sharp departure from the way spectrum policy and auction proceeds have been handled by Congress in the past.

Spectrum is such a valuable natural resource because it is an essential building block for connecting family and friends as well as delivering critical services like education and health to people across the country. It’s also critical to everyday safety for first responders. Without spectrum, we would not have radio stations, smartphones, the app economy, or drones. Many of these technological advancements were developed by American innovators, pushing the limits on the ways spectrum could be used in new and exciting ways. But past performance does not guarantee future results, so America must remain a leader in spectrum policy.

For more than three decades, Congress has granted the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) the authority to make spectrum available using competitive bidding, or auctions.

Granting the FCC this authority has served both the public and the nation well. Today, the United States is a global leader in delivering 5G, advanced Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, and other next-generation wireless technologies to consumers across the country.

At the same time, spectrum auctions, which have raised over \$230 billion for the federal government, have helped fund important public communications priorities, including the Rip and Replace reimbursement program, the construction of FirstNet, and broadband infrastructure grants.

That’s why spectrum policy has long been an area of bipartisan agreement. In fact, we have worked closely with the Republicans on this Committee for the past three years on bills to extend the FCC’s auction authority and use spectrum proceeds to pay for bipartisan spending priorities.

One of the areas of bipartisan agreement was the need to fund Next Generation 9-1-1. This funding would modernize our 9-1-1 networks to allow the public to use modern day communications tools like sending texts, images, and videos to first responders and emergency personnel. This technology will reduce response times and equip first responders with life-saving

information before they arrive at the scene, which will better assist people in their critical time of need. The recent devastating wildfires in California are another reminder of how vital seconds can be in an emergency.

This program clearly serves the public interest and proceeds from auction of a public airwaves are ideal to fund it. Unfortunately, it seems that Republicans are now going to abandon this bipartisan work in order to march ahead to give tax breaks to the rich. This is simply not the way these funds should be used. The auction of public airwaves should fund programs for the public good.

Republicans should keep that in mind and reject proposals that would include spectrum in any reconciliation. Instead, they should work with us to set good spectrum policy and to use auction proceeds to fund vital programs that actually serve the public not the wealthy few.

And I don't think the stakes could be any higher. Failure to replenish the commercial spectrum pipeline risks our nation falling behind our counterparts across the globe, particularly China, because we want to produce cutting-edge consumer innovations and enhance our national security capabilities.

We cannot allow that to happen and that's why we should be working together. We should also work to ensure the advancements made possible by spectrum are delivered to all Americans regardless of their income or zip code. Too often rural, tribal, and low-income areas are left behind as next-generation technologies are deployed. We have to continue to work on making these services more affordable to everyone.

Finally, I want to bid farewell to Jennifer Epperson, who is our Chief Counsel on this Subcommittee, who is leaving the Committee after six years of service. During that time, she's played an instrumental role in the historic broadband investments we made in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the creation of the Affordable Connectivity Program, and our bipartisan rip and replace legislation. We've accomplished a lot in the Subcommittee – much of it bipartisan – throughout her time and I thank Jennifer for helping to make it happen. I wish her nothing but the best and thank her for all her contributions.