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FIXING BIDEN'S BROADBAND BLUNDER

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5, 2025

House of Representatives,

Subcommittee on Communications

and Technology,

Committee on Energy and Commerce,

Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:01 p.m., in Room 2123, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Richard Hudson [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Hudson, Allen, Latta, Bilirakis, Carter of Georgia, Dunn, Joyce, Fulcher, Pfluger, Cammack, Obernolte, Houchin, Fry, Kean, Goldman, Fedorchak, Guthrie (ex officio), Matsui, Soto, Ruiz, Peters, Dingell, Kelly, Barragan, Carter of Louisiana, Menendez, Landsman, McClellan, Castor, and Pallone (ex officio).

Staff Present: Jessica Donlon, General Counsel; Emily Hale, Staff Assistant; Kate Harper, Chief Counsel, Communications & Technology; Megan Jackson, Staff Director; Noah Jackson, Clerk, Communications & Technology; Daniel Kelly, Press Secretary; Sophie

Khanahmadi, Deputy Staff Director; John Lin, Senior Counsel, Communications & Technology; Joel Miller, Chief Counsel; Elaina Murphy, Professional Staff Member, Communications & Technology; Seth Ricketts, Special Assistant; Dylan Rogers, Professional Staff Member, Communications & Technology; Chris Sarley, Member Services/Stakeholder Director; Matt VanHyfte, Communications Director; Hannah Anton, Minority Policy Analyst; Waverly Gordon, Minority Deputy Staff Director and General Counsel; Tiffany Guarascio, Minority Staff Director; Dan Miller, Minority Professional Staff Member; Emma Roehrig, Minority Staff Assistant; Michael Scurato, Minority FCC Detailee; and Johanna Thomas, Minority Counsel, Communications & Technology.

Mr. Hudson. The subcommittee will come to order.

The chair recognizes himself for an opening statement.

Closing the digital divide is a top priority for this committee. Too many Americans, particularly those in rural America, like so many places in my home State of North Carolina, lack access to reliable high speed broadband. With so much of everyday life requiring an internet connection, this is a vital need.

Since 2020, Congress has provided billions of dollars to connect unserved Americans. The most significant effort is the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act, or IJA. This massive bill included the \$42.5 billion broadband equity access and deployment, or BEAD, program with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, NTIA.

It has been over 3 years since IJA became law, and we are still waiting for the first home to be connected using these funds. I think we should understand how this happened.

First, FCC maps that Biden's FCC chairwoman, Rosenworcel, said would be ready in months instead took much longer to develop. Then the Biden-Harris administration saddled the BEAD program with regulations unrelated to broadband to appease left wing interest groups. These included technology preferences, burdensome labor rules, and climate change requirements, to name a few.

Worse, the Biden administration flagrantly ignored the law by forcing States to regulate broadband rates before NTIA would approve their proposals, even though the law explicitly prohibits rate regulation.

These actions did nothing to deploy broadband but, instead, created confusion

while making the program less attractive to providers and deployment more expensive.

Energy and commerce committee Republicans are committed to fixing these mistakes so that every American has access to broadband as quickly as possible. That is why today, I, along with many Republicans on this committee, introduced the Speed to BEAD Act. This bill would eliminate the burdensome Biden regulations so that we can get money out the door, shovels into the ground, and broadband into as many homes as possible.

Specifically, this bill would eliminate the unnecessary expensive regulations NTIA imposed, further clarify the rate regulation by NTIA or any other entity is prohibited, ensure that the program is run on a technology neutral basis, and more efficiently use tax dollars by ensuring that awards to providers are cost-effective and that funds are only used for deployment.

These changes to BEAD program can be implemented quickly, provide certainty to the States, and not hinder the progress that States have already made.

And I am excited to hear that Secretary of Commerce, Howard Lutnick, just a few minutes ago, announced that he is launching a review of the BEAD program to cut red tape, eliminate waste, and make sure Americans get connected faster.

I am thrilled to have him join me in this effort.

Performing BEAD is one important step to ensuring every American has access to broadband, but it is not enough. We also need to reform the permitting process for broadband projects. If we do not reform this process, all the money will get tied up in burdensome permitting reviews, resulting in more unnecessary delays.

For the past three Congresses, energy and commerce Republicans have introduced legislation to streamline the broadband permitting process. We have proposed codifying existing shock clocks to provide predictability in State and local permit

reviews, exempting previously disturbed lands from duplicative and burdensome environmental and historic preservation reviews, and instilling transparency and urgency in permitting on Federal lands.

Some of these bills had bipartisan support and passed the House last Congress. I wish my Democratic colleagues had been willing to work with us on the most meaningful reforms, which were included in Representative Buddy Carter's American Broadband Deployment Act.

I hope this new Congress and the urgency of the moment will inspire bipartisan cooperation on this effort, and I certainly extend my hand to my colleagues across the aisle. We must do everything we can to remove these unnecessary barriers to deployment.

In conclusion, unserved Americans have waited too long for the promise of connectivity, but now is the moment to close the digital divide once and for all.

Today's hearing is an opportunity to hear from stakeholders about how to address these challenges and how to stop it from happening. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

I now yield 5 minutes to my colleague, Ranking Member Doris Matsui, for her opening statement.

You are recognized.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hudson follows:]

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Ms. Matsui. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today also.

We all recognize that reliable high speed internet is no longer a luxury. It is a necessity. It powers our economy and supports education. It strengthens public health, and it connects us to our loved ones.

That is why under the Biden administration, Congress passed a Bipartisan Infrastructure Law investing \$65 billion to close the digital divide. This includes over \$42 billion for the broadband equity, access, and deployment program or, as we call it, BEAD, to bring high speed internet to tens of millions of Americans who still lack access.

Just as critically, Congress also directed nearly \$3 billion in digital equity grants to ensure all communities have the skills, training, and technology to reap the full benefits of online access.

During the last administration, NTIA worked diligently with State and local partners to make the most of this once in a generation investment to connect all Americans. Thanks to this diligence, States like Louisiana, Nevada, and Delaware stand ready to put shovels in the ground this year to connect their communities, but only if this administration moves quickly to allow them to go ahead.

Many other States, including California, are hard at work launching a fair and competitive award process and implementing digital equity plans so that our Federal broadband dollars go to where they are needed the most.

Yet, instead of building on this program, President Trump is actively sabotaging it, delaying and injecting uncertainty into Federal broadband programs. Freezing broadband funding ignores the law and harms the tens of millions of Americans who are counting on these programs to get connected. They can't afford to wait and neither can we.

That's certainly true in the Sacramento region. Just 20 minutes outside the city rural communities still suffer major gaps in broadband coverage due to years of under investment. Head further into the California delta and the need is just as urgent. Our farming communities rely on broadband for economic growth, education, and basic quality of life.

BEAD is a critical lifeline for these communities. Yet, Republicans are delaying BEAD so they can water down or outright eliminate protections for affordability, good paying jobs, and climate resilient networks. These changes will drive up cost for consumers while driving down the quality of service.

I am also deeply concerned by attempts to divert funding from fiber to Elon Musk's Starlink satellite service. Unlike satellite, fiber is a gold standard in future proof technology that will grow with consumers' data needs over time.

Granted, some remote areas may be better served using non-fiber alternatives, but existing BEAD guidance already recognizes this. We need smart broadband investments that will last, not short-term fixes that can cost taxpayers more in the long run.

Republicans claim they are just being technology neutral, but can we trust this when the Trump administration has given Elon Musk nearly unfettered authority to further his business interests by taking over government contracts and dismantling agencies regulating his companies?

And last week, not a single Republican voted with Democrats to ensure this committee conducts oversight into conflicts of interest like Musk.

So forgive me if I find it hard to believe that Republicans will ensure that the Trump administration applies broadband rules fairly.

Let's be honest. It seems to me that today's hearing is about Republicans fishing

for excuses to toss 3 years of work into the trash, undermining our efforts to connect every American.

I urge my Republican colleagues to stop the delays, stop the sabotage, work with us to fully implement all Federal broadband programs, including BEAD and digital equity. This includes holding the Trump administration accountable for delays, conflicts of interest, and violations of the law. Otherwise, the American people will be paying for Republican's broadband blunders for generations to come.

And with that, I yield the balance of my time.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Matsui follows:]

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Mr. Hudson. Thank you.

I will now recognize the chairman of the full committee, the gentleman from Kentucky, for 5 minutes for his opening statement.

The Chair. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

And we are going to do oversight of this, and we are going to move forward in this area. I think what was just said is 3 years of effort and not one inch of fiber has been built.

Our people are clambering in our area for local broadband, to have access to the internet and broadband.

And, you know, Congress appropriates and authorizes spending of this amount of money, and 3 years into it, for some reason, because not following the law, trying to put more in the law than the law requires, unfortunately, people are just starting to speak up about that now instead of over the last 3 years.

But I want to start with introducing Greg Hale from Logan County, Kentucky. He is a great friend of mine. I have known him for a long time, and he really is passionate. He is a believer in getting broadband to rural America, rural Kentucky. In particular, rural Logan County.

And if there is somebody better in the country that knows this issue and is also a practitioner of this issue, trying to get it done, they may exist but I haven't met them yet. You are the best that I know of. And so that is why we wanted you to be here, because we know you can share the most important part.

But as I said, I represent rural and growing communities in Kentucky's Second District. Access is critical for our students to do their homework, for people to connect with their doctors, and to stay in touch with their friends and loved ones. Connectivity helps bolster communities.

In the private and public sector, investments totalling in the billions of dollars to build out communications infrastructure across the country have yet to close the digital divide for many Americans, including many of my constituents who lack access to the broadband at home.

On the Federal level alone, there are more than 130 broadband programs across 15 different agencies, all with varying amounts of funding and requirements and varying amounts of success.

In 2021, the BEAD program had more than 42 billion in taxpayer dollars for broadband expansion in unserved areas. And yet, as I said, not a single inch of fiber. What is 2021? Four years. And so it is 4 years. Not a single inch of fiber has been laid as a result.

Despite naming Vice President Harris as the broadband czar, the Biden administration failed to deliver on their promise of connecting all Americans through BEAD by failing to connect even one American.

A one-size-fits-all approach does not work. As a first step, the program needs to be reformed to be technology neutral so States have the flexibility to choose what technologies are appropriate for them.

We need to eliminate the burdensome and unnecessary regulations that the Biden administration imposed that have nothing to do with the bill, except to slow down the process.

This program has been a failure of mass proportions, and we must act quickly to course correct so that billions of American taxpayers, their dollars are not wasted, where people get access to service and in a quicker and prompt way.

In addition to BEAD, today we are going to be talking about the FCC's Universal Service Fund. And this program supports broadband service in high cost often rural

areas at schools, libraries, rural health centers across Kentucky and the country and access connectivity for low income Americans so they can afford broadband service.

The constitutionality of the USF is being challenged in the Supreme Court, and if the court ultimately holds that USF is unconstitutional, the program will come to an end, and it will be a devastating outcome if that happens, leaving many Americans without service.

Congress must act to affirm the constitutionality of this program, and I hope this is an area where we can find bipartisan agreement to react quickly if we have to react quickly.

In addition to addressing the immediate need, we also need to address the long-term sustainability of USF. After almost 30 years, Congress needs to reevaluate the role that USF should play in providing support, particularly after the significant investment in broadband over the past 5 years.

So I really look forward to today's discussion. I appreciate my good friend from Kentucky for many years to be here, and I look forward to what will be the outcome of this hearing.

And Mr. Chairman, with that, I yield back.

[The prepared statement of The Chair follows:]

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Mr. Hudson. Thank you, Chairman.

I now recognize the gentleman from New Jersey, the ranking member, for 5 minutes for his opening statement.

Mr. Pallone. Thank you, Chairman Hudson.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's \$42 billion BEAD program was designed to ensure every American household can connect to high speed reliable and affordable internet. Not one Republican on this committee supported those investments. Instead, committee Republicans have done nothing but undermine our efforts to deploy more reliable and affordable broadband.

And I regret that today's hearing is more the same with an eye in the rear-view mirror.

Just so the record is clear, former Assistant Secretary Alan Davidson and his team at NTIA rose to the occasion to build and implement the largest and most sophisticated broadband program in our Nation's history, one with 56 different nerve centers and unique sets of considerations, with independent planning and decision-making taking place in every single State and territory.

Three States have received approval of their final proposal. Four States have completed their selection of internet service providers after widely successful application rounds. And 30 States are in the midst of running highly promising application rounds.

In 6 weeks, however, the Trump administration has not moved one State forward in the process. And this is not a surprise since the administration has, instead, prioritized dismantling the Federal Government by gutting agencies and firing Federal employees, and congressional Republicans have silently watched from the sidelines.

And we know that Elon Musk is salivating over the prospect of steering BEAD dollars to his companies. Just yesterday the Wall Street Journal reported Musk's SpaceX

and Starlink could receive up to \$20 billion worth of BEAD funding under new plans being developed inside the commerce department.

Musk is a grifter, and Republicans are going to just stand by and watch.

To be clear, many of the changes our colleagues have suggested for BEAD can be done without delays or mandates. Loosening funding requirements they don't like, while misguided, does not require States to go back to the drawing board.

The policies we see at the Department of Commerce, however, are like shackles on broadband providers in Louisiana, Nevada, and Delaware who need only basic administrative approvals to begin their work in as little as 6 weeks. And instead, companies are sitting on tons of supply with a labor force questioning if there will be work next month.

Make no mistake. The current threat to the BEAD program could be avoided if only Republicans in the Trump administration would get out of their own way and let this program move forward as intended. This opportunity to connect every American to reliable high speed internet will not come around again, unfortunately.

But I want to yield the balance of my time to Representative Carter of Louisiana.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Pallone follows:]

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Mr. Carter of Louisiana. Thank you, Ranking Member Pallone.

In January of this year, Louisiana became the first State of the Nation to secure Federal funding, Federal funding approval for our plan to deploy \$1.3 billion in broadband and equity access and deployment, or BEAD, funding.

This achievement is a testament to the bipartisan nature of Louisiana's approach to universal connectivity and illustrates how we all should strive to treat broadband access in our States.

The State began the BEAD process under the Democratic governor, John Bel Edwards. It completed its plan under the Republican governor, Jeff Landry, who called this program a generational investment that will create thousands of jobs, drive billions in economic growth, and transform Louisiana's communities in all 64 parishes.

The State's plan will connect approximately 140,000 locations to high speed internet through funding awards to 20 internet service providers, and nearly 70 percent of the funds awarded to Louisiana companies. More than 90 percent of these locations are set to transition from zero connectivity to future proof broadband fiber.

Altogether, these broadband investments will drive significant economic growth for the State, creating approximately 10,000 new jobs and generating an estimated 2 to \$3 billion in new revenue for Louisiana companies.

However, since the Trump administration took office, just a week after Louisiana received approval for its final proposal, the commerce department has withheld final funding approval that would have otherwise put shovels in the ground in just 6 weeks in my home State.

And now we see reports just yesterday that commerce secretary, Lutnick, is considering wholesale changes to the program that would cut or jeopardize all of the hard work that has been put into this point, allowing significant, significantly more money

to go to Elon Musk's satellite services.

This unexpected delay has stalled progress, frozen investments made by small internet service providers and contractors, and left rural communities still waiting on the promise of broadband access.

This administration must act and provide the certainty to Louisiana residents and internet service providers looking for answers and receiving none.

We have worked too hard and come too far to start over again. Any action by the current administration that would threaten this progress would be a grave mistake.

And I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Carter of Louisiana follows:]

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Mr. Hudson. The gentleman yields back.

I assume the ranking member would yield back.

We have now concluded with member opening statements.

The chair reminds members that pursuant to committee rules, all members' opening statements will be made part of the record.

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today to testify before this subcommittee. Our witnesses will have 5 minutes to provide an opening statement, which will be followed by a round of questions from our members.

The witnesses here before us today are Mr. Grant Spellmeyer, president and CEO, ASA Connects; Tom Donovan, president and CEO, competitive -- Tim Donovan, excuse me. Tim Donovan, president and CEO, Competitive Carriers Association. Thank you. Greg Hale, CEO of LTC Connect; and Sarah Morris, the former acting deputy administrator for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

Again, thank you all for being here. We look forward to hearing your testimony.

Mr. Spellmeyer, you are recognized for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

**STATEMENTS OF GRANT SPELLMEYER, PRESIDENT AND CEO, ACA CONNECTS; TIM DONOVAN, PRESIDENT AND CEO, COMPETITIVE CARRIERS ASSOCIATION; GREG HALE, CEO, LTC CONNECT; SARAH MORRIS, FORMER DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR, NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION (ACTING)**

**STATEMENT OF GRANT SPELLMEYER**

Mr. Spellmeyer. Thank you.

Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Pallone, it is always an honor to appear before this committee.

America's Communications Association, ACA Connects, proudly represents more than 500 independent broadband and cable operators across the country. We serve all 50 States, offering connectivity to nearly one in four American households.

Although, some of my members serve hundreds of thousands of customers, most of them serve only a few thousand customers and only in a county or two in one particular State. They remain committed to finding ways to make quality broadband service available and affordable to all Americans. They live in the communities alongside their customers.

In the past 5 years, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, they have expanded coverage of broadband by 64 percent. While my members often prefer fiber builds because of their superior performance and durability, they deploy all available technologies to get the job done.

My members have deep roots in the communities they serve that can be traced back generations. I was explaining this to my children the other day, but folks don't

understand any longer how cable television started. It started because the largest providers were ignoring rural America, and my members needed a way to bring programming to places where broadcast TV signals couldn't reach.

Providers actually dragged cables over the hills in order to bring that signal to customers. Today, it has evolved into what we see in the broadband world.

This history is why many of my members were initially very eager to participate in BEAD when it was passed by Congress. Unfortunately, their enthusiasm has waned due to the way NTIA subsequently implemented parts of the law.

The areas that remain to be served today are the most costly in the country. The job won't get done but for things like the BEAD program. The reality is every dollar a provider spends complying with unnecessary regulatory burdens is a dollar that is gone from investment and drives up prices.

By happenstance, ACA Connects has a large presence in town this week. We are up on the Hill. The timing is good. We really have a simple message. We, my members, are ready to finish the job in rural America. We urge Congress to fine-tune the program and to get shovels in the ground later this year.

In order to do that, Congress should direct the NTIA to strip costly and extraneous requirements that are deterring participation and ensure that States have reasonable flexibility in evaluating the broadband technologies that should be used in each State.

The one thing we can't afford to do is to materially delay implementation. States that are ready to proceed quickly should have the flexibility to do so.

Beyond the BEAD program itself, Congress must act to speed up the deployment of broadband by adopting permitting and right-of-way reforms. Specifically, we encourage Congress to adopt reforms that encourage consistency in State and local permitting and to take action to streamline and harmonize permitting policies across

Federal agencies.

ACA Connects was proud last year to support Congressman Buddy Carter's bill, the American Broadband Deployment Act. And we are also glad that Congressman Pfluger and Soto are leading again this year on the Federal Broadband Deployment Tracking Act.

Backing up to the 50,000 foot level, as you all know, this committee has a long and proud legacy of bipartisan problem solving. As the courts have recently affirmed, Congress writes the laws, and Federal agencies implement them.

The issues that we are discussing here today, in my opinion, are all ripe for action by this committee. The committee should act to codify clear direction to the Federal agencies involved on both of these subjects and move forward quickly.

We also urge the committee to apply this approach, let's call it regular order, to tackling other thorny telecommunications issues under its jurisdiction, whether that be universal service reform or guaranteeing a free and open internet.

Congress has a golden opportunity to codify rules that will remove uncertainty and encourage investment.

And with that, we look forward to working with the committee.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Spellmeyer follows:]

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Mr. Hudson. Thank you.

Mr. Donovan, you are recognized for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

#### **STATEMENT OF TIM DONOVAN**

Mr. Donovan. Thank you.

Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify about the challenges facing rural communications providers.

CCA members range from small rural providers serving fewer than 5,000 customers to regional and nationwide operators serving millions, as well as vendors and suppliers throughout the communications ecosystem, connecting communities using all technologies available, including mobile, fixed wireless, wired, and satellite.

Every day CCA members work to provide high quality broadband services by upgrading and expanding their networks, including in the most remote and hard to serve areas across the country.

I would like to take a moment to say thank you for the work to fund the shortfall in the rip and replace program, which created an existential threat to rural connectivity in several areas. We look forward to working with you and the FCC to see this program to completion and continued work on network security.

As policymakers consider the future of rural connectivity, we are at an inflection point. Decisions made today will either advance American leadership in the communications industry, including 5G and future wireless services, and close the digital divide or risk abandoning critical investments that rural Americans rely on every day.

Decisive action is needed in several key areas. First, the Universal Service Fund

must be sustained and modernized. USF is the most effective tool for bridging the digital divide, including preserving existing networks while work continues to expand broadband access. It is the backbone of rural broadband.

The Supreme Court's review of USF's constitutionality presents a direct threat to connectivity across America. Congress must be prepared to act swiftly to preserve USF if the court identifies concerns.

Additionally, USF should be modernized to broaden the contribution space to include those that benefit from the networks it supports, and support must be available to maintain and preserve networks.

Second, the 5G fund needs improvements. Within the USF high cost fund, the 5G fund is intended to support rural mobile broadband but needs adjustments to ensure success. Specifically, the 5G fund must base any transition away from legacy support on availability of ongoing operational support, use updated service and speed eligibility thresholds, and have a budget based on anticipated needs to complete the work.

Additionally, funding decisions must be guided by reliable data with a robust challenge process. Currently, the mobile coverage map is not living up to the promise of your goals in passing the Broadband Data Act. The fund should also be aligned with other programs like BEAD.

Third, targeted BEAD improvements will maximize deployment. The BEAD program is an important investment in rural broadband, but its implementation must allow flexibility and technology choices.

BEAD should empower local providers who know their communities the best to select the technologies that make the most sense for each situation, including fiber, wireless, and satellite.

Additionally, policymakers should avoid conditions that make BEAD participation

prohibitively challenging and maximize the program's impact by reducing permitting delays and ensuring BEAD funds are not taxed as income.

Fourth, restoring spectrum auction authority is urgent. It has been nearly 2 years since the FCC's auction authority expired. This delay threatens America's wireless leadership. Congress should not only reinstate auction authority but also ensure there is sufficient spectrum available for full power commercial use and build on policies that ensure carriers serving rural America have a meaningful opportunity to secure spectrum.

Policymakers should also maximize the utility of spectrum currently available for wireless use, including increasing power levels in the CBRS band to better serve rural America.

Finally, sighting and permitting reforms can accelerate deployment. As Congress explores ways to support deployment through broadband programs like BEAD and USF, updates to sighting and permitting processes should align and enhance those initiatives.

CCA members need permits from Federal, State, and local authorities, depending on the area, to deploy, maintain, and upgrade their networks. Current processes for acquiring the necessary permits from various agencies can take months or even years.

Efficient, manageable, and predictable permitting processes will be increasingly necessary to process the volume of applications and workload, which will inevitably come with the roll out of BEAD and other programs.

In closing, every CCA member has an interest in ensuring that all Americans have access to the latest broadband services, especially those in rural and high cost areas. CCA is committed to working with all stakeholders to accomplish the challenging task of promoting broadband connectivity for millions of consumers in rural America.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this important hearing, and I welcome any questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Donovan follows:]

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Mr. Hudson. Thank you.

Mr. Hale, you are recognized for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

#### **STATEMENT OF GREG HALE**

Mr. Hale. Thank you.

Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Pallone, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing focused on how best to promote access to broadband.

I am Greg Hale, CEO of LTC Connect in Auburn, Kentucky.

Incorporated in 1954, LTC Connect is a smart rural community cooperative owned by our members. We provide up to five gigabit broadband internet and voice services to an area of more than 500 square miles in rural south-central Kentucky.

We are members of NTCA, the Rural Broadband Association, which represents about 850 rural broadband providers that are delivering broadband services in deeply rural communities. NTCA members collectively serve less than 5 percent of the population of the United States but nearly 30 percent of its landmass.

Today, I would like to emphasize the essential mission of universal service, which is not just getting Americans connected but keeping them connected. If we do not meet this challenge, we will see hearings like today being held 5 or 10 years from now asking how we missed the mark.

The rates that rural consumers pay are rarely sufficient to cover the cost of building and operating a network. The single biggest challenge to connecting rural America and keeping it connected is simply making the business case to build and operate any broadband network at all.

This is where the high cost USF program created at the FCC to fulfill the requirements of Congress' 1996 Telecom Act hits the mark. With USF's support, providers can make a business case for delivering and sustaining broadband services for rural citizens at affordable rates.

Rural providers have been able to leverage grant funding to get to some locations previously unserved. Most grants require some percentage of capital match.

Many projects like ours at LTC Connect do not involve grant funding at all but leverage the use of loans or private capital. Projects are undertaken after a business analysis that involves the continued receipt of universal service funding.

USF does not reimburse capital expenses immediately but reimburses expenses gradually over the depreciable life of the network. For NTCA companies, this cost recovery often takes place over a period of 18 to 30 years.

Unfortunately, USF programs are under attack, and the sustainability and affordability of connectivity for millions of rural Americans is at risk.

A nine to seven Fifth Circuit decision declaring the USF contribution method unconstitutional is now before the Supreme Court for review, and a negative decision could have devastating impacts for broadband in rural America.

A recent NTCA member survey show rates could skyrocket to an average of \$165 a month, where service even survives and all new investment is chilled.

We urge all Members of Congress to stand ready to support legislative efforts that could help ensure that rural Americans stay connected while also reforming USF contributions so all that benefit from universal connectivity do their part.

The BEAD program is of great importance and, if executed effectively, will provide required capital to reach most, if not all, unserved Americans. Many NTCA members are actively evaluating participation in the program. There are parts of the BEAD program

that should be closely examined for modification. These changes need not reconstruct the program from scratch but just recalibrate as the program continues to move forward to serve those in desperate need of broadband.

First, I would recommend that NTIA consider publishing all waivers that have been granted to various States and consider where these can be made available to all States.

NTIA could also develop a more reasonable approach to the low cost option that better reflects the challenging economics of rural areas.

Additional considerations may include relaxing the letter of credit requirements, relaxing workforce obligations, and other policy changes that do not relate directly to the deployment of broadband.

It is important to use every tool in our toolkit to achieve the BEAD's program mission. We will not get the same kind of networks everywhere, but this does not mean we should settle for the lowest common denominator either.

Since dial up internet was launched over 30 years ago, we have consistently underestimated the amount of speed and capacity customers will require in the future.

Robust networks that can provide what businesses and customers need today and what they will need well into the future should be the goal even as we empower States to make the best decisions for their unique circumstances.

In my written testimony, I also outline other issues that require attention, including permitting delays, the accuracy of the broadband map, and the taxing of broadband grants.

NTCA members, like LTC Connect, are deeply committed to the consumers we serve, and given our track record of success in rural areas, small community-based providers should be seen as a critical component of any strategy to achieve universal service.

We look forward to working with you and other stakeholders to ensure that all Americans will experience the many benefits of broadband for decades to come.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address these issues, and thank you for your commitment to getting and keeping every American connected.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hale follows:]

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Mr. Hudson. Thank you.

Ms. Morris, you are recognized for 5 minutes for your opening statement.

#### **STATEMENT OF SARAH MORRIS**

Ms. Morris. Thank you.

Chairman Hudson, Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Matsui, Ranking Member Pallone, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

We stand at a pivotal moment in our Nation's broadband expansion efforts. Over the last 3 years, States have made tremendous progress implementing the broadband programs established under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Middle mile projects are under construction with over 4,500 miles of fiber being built, digital equity grants are being awarded, and States are in the final stages of the 14 step BEAD process set by Congress.

Through BEAD, the States are working to connect everyone in America to affordable, reliable high speed internet. We are on the verge of historic broadband deployment in each of your districts, but right now all progress is at a standstill.

Since the new administration took office, the Department of Commerce has issued no new guidance or approvals. This inaction means the communities in your districts remain disconnected.

If we do not restart these programs very soon, we risk throwing away years of careful planning and bipartisan effort in the States. These investments are critical. The broadband grant programs were designed to overcome the economic and social barriers that have kept the hardest to reach communities offline.

As this subcommittee knows, connectivity is not just about convenience. It is about access to healthcare, education, jobs, and economic opportunity.

For example, the Department of Veterans Affairs has found that telehealth can be just as effective as in-person mental health treatment. When veterans received improved connectivity, suicide-related emergency room visits decreased by 36 percent, allowing veterans to receive critical care in the comfort of their homes. For these individuals, broadband access is, quite literally, a life or death issue.

In rural areas, broadband can transform communities, sparking entrepreneurship and increasing business revenue. Even before shovels hit the ground, communities see the benefits.

In North Carolina and Georgia, fiber companies have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in new fiber manufacturing facilities, bringing jobs and revenue directly to these States.

And by boosting domestic manufacturing capabilities, these programs ensure, for example, that U.S. AI data centers will be connected with American made fiber rather than Chinese fiber.

Despite these investments, some have expressed concerns about the pace of the BEAD implementation. The reality is that States are almost finished with the 14 step process Congress designed. All 56 States and territories have completed key planning steps and most during the final stages of selecting providers and approving project funding. More than half are already reviewing bids from ISPs.

To halt progress now or, worse, for States to redo their work would be disastrous. It would delay broadband deployment for years and waste taxpayer dollars.

Congress intentionally gave States flexibility in implementing BEAD. States know best how to address their unique geographic and economic conditions, and they should

be allowed to make the transformative investments that they are poised to do.

States have already addressed the most controversial areas of the law. The law requires ISPs receiving BEAD funding to offer a low cost plan defined by States, in consultation with NTIA. States have already developed reasonable, flexible, market-driven solutions to meet the statutory requirement.

Similarly, the law prioritizes future proof technologies, like fiberoptic networks, ensuring that communities receive infrastructure that can meet their needs for decades. However, the law also allows flexibility. If fiber is too expensive in certain areas, States can deploy other technologies, including fixed wireless or satellite service instead.

The three final proposals we have seen reflect the range of ways that States are implementing these statutory requirements.

And we know that access alone is not enough. Many people, especially seniors, veterans, and rural residents need support to adopt and use broadband effectively. The law includes digital equity grants to help individuals gain digital skills, access devices, and feel safe online.

These programs are already well underway. Cutting or delaying these efforts would undermine the entire purpose of the broadband expansion, ensuring that everyone in America can fully participate in the digital economy.

We are closer than ever to closing the digital divide. More than half the States are actively soliciting bids to deploy broadband, and three State has completed every required step in the BEAD program. But without action from the Department of Commerce, these efforts are stalled.

Congress must ensure that States can proceed with their plans. We have a rare opportunity to connect every home, every farm, and business in America to high speed internet. Let's not squander it.

Thank you. And I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Morris follows:]

\*\*\*\*\* COMMITTEE INSERT \*\*\*\*\*

Mr. Hudson. Thank you.

I will now recognize myself for 5 minutes to ask questions.

Ms. Morris, you were a senior advisor at NTIA when the BEAD notice of funding opportunity was developed and implemented. You know as much about this program as anybody. So I appreciate you being here with us today.

Was it NTIA's decision or the White House's decision to include the fiber preference?

Ms. Morris. So it is a complicated question to answer. The NOFO, it was NTIA's decision. The assistant secretary signed off on the NOFO and released it, and a lot of discussion went into the preparation and decision-making behind the NOFO.

And as we were drafting -- as NTIA was drafting the NOFO, a lot of factors went into how each equity was threaded and the ultimate goals of the program that we wanted to achieve. And the goals that we wanted to achieve were to push fiber as far out as economically possible and to allow other technologies, which we recognized would be important in reaching the goal of connecting everyone in the country to affordable, reliable high speed internet, to allow those technologies to be a part where fiber was not economically feasible.

Mr. Hudson. Gotcha.

Did the extraneous requirements on labor and climate come from NTIA or the White House?

Ms. Morris. The entire NOFO came from NTIA and was signed off by leadership at NTIA.

Mr. Hudson. I appreciate that.

And so then it was NTIA's decision to force States to regulate rates despite the law's prohibition for that, or is that from the White House?

Ms. Morris. The law is very clear that every State is required to set a low cost option in consultation with the assistant secretary and -- in consultation with NTIA and with approval of the assistant secretary, and NTIA followed the law in regard to that requirement.

Mr. Hudson. Well, were you aware that NTIA was violating the law by forcing States to include a rate or formula for a rate in their initial proposal?

Ms. Morris. NTIA followed the letter of the law as we interpreted it.

Mr. Hudson. Okay. Well, I appreciate that answer.

Mr. Spellmeyer, I have heard from many providers that plan to participate in the BEAD program, that these unnecessary requirements will continue to delay broadband deployment. Do you agree that removing labor requirements, rate regulation, climate standards, as well as streamlining permitting will speed up the broadband deployment?

Mr. Spellmeyer. Yes, Mr. Chairman, my members support all of those items you just listed. It certainly has been a -- in some of those instances, it causes delay. In others, it increases prices, cost, and, therefore, you know, the number of areas you can cover.

Mr. Hudson. I agree with that.

Mr. Donovan, NTIA has not administered the BEAD program in a technology neutral way. How has the lack of tech neutrality in BEAD affected CCA's members?

Mr. Donovan. As our members look at the opportunity for BEAD, they are just asking to be able to use every way they possibly can to connect their neighbors. They know their geographies. They know the challenges. They know if they need to go around the river. They know where wireless makes the most sense. They know where to put fiber. So they are just asking for that flexibility.

Mr. Hudson. Well, you know, my State experienced a devastating hurricane last

fall. We had folks disconnected from loved ones for days, unable to reach emergency workers for help. What can we do to restore connectivity faster during recovery efforts in the future?

Mr. Donovan. Since we work with our members, especially in North Carolina and in places where entire wired networks were completely washed away, restoring wireless and mobile services is an immediate way to provide connectivity. And what would be really beneficial for that is making sure that those carriers can use their spectrum resources most efficiently to connect their neighbors in their communities.

So that includes things like taking spectrum licenses they have and their CBRS band and being able to use power levels that are comparable to neighboring bands that allow a signal to go three to five times further from the same tower.

So things like that would be really helpful to make sure you can restore services immediately.

Mr. Hudson. Well, I appreciate that.

I will now recognize the ranking member of the committee, Ms. Matsui, for 5 minutes to ask your questions.

Ms. Matsui. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Roughly one in five American households lack access to high speed internet. They can't afford to wait on broadband. Yet, Republicans are risking changes to the BEAD program that would delay and weaken this once in a generation investment.

This is even more frustrating when States are nearly at the finish line. States like Louisiana, as Mr. Carter said. You know, they are ready to push shovels in the ground in a matter of weeks. And what happens if the Trump administration gets out of their way, if they get out of their way, then they can do that.

Ms. Morris, what is at stake for American people if BEAD funding is further

delayed and disrupted?

Ms. Morris. Thank you, ranking member, for the question.

Everything is at stake. This is a once in a generation opportunity. I don't believe that we will ever again get \$42.5 billion to connect every corner of the country to high speed, affordable internet. And without access to high speed, affordable internet, communities are losing access to healthcare, jobs, education, economic opportunity. And that is being exacerbated every day that we pause this program and fail to put shovels in the ground, especially if States are right on the cusp of doing so.

Ms. Matsui. All right. Thank you.

Congress made clear that providers taking Federal BEAD dollars must offer at least one low cost plan.

Ms. Morris, how would Americans be impacted by a Republican proposal to weaken this requirement?

Ms. Morris. Well, if we are investing all of these resources into building these networks, but they aren't affordable to the communities they are designed to serve, then we are building bridges to nowhere. We are building networks to no one.

And States have worked through the analysis and have done careful planning to understand what affordability means in their State and have implemented the guidance of the statute appropriately and in a variety of ways.

Ms. Matsui. Now, I am also concerned about Republican attempts to divert BEAD funding from fiber broadband infrastructure to satellite technologies, like Elon Musk's Starlink.

The BEAD rules reference for fiber where economically vital isn't just happenstance. Optical fiber infrastructure can support the connectivity needs of consumers for decades. And fiber is a super highway for data intensive technology,

such as AI and fixed wireless.

Unlike fiber, satellites need replacement about every 5 years and can be wildly more expensive in the long run.

Ms. Morris, why would cutting back on BEAD's investment and fiber technology risk a two-tier system? And who would these changes hurt the most?

Ms. Morris. Thank you, ranking member.

As you note, fiber is the platform for our next generation of innovation, and communities that lack access to fiber will continue to suffer.

If you want 5G and 6G connectivity in your districts, you need fiber to your districts. If you want advanced healthcare systems to your districts, you need fiber in your districts. If you want next generation 911 service in your districts, you need fiber in your districts.

Now, we recognize, NTIA recognized in the BEAD NOFO that fiber is not an economically viable solution for every single household, but the goal of the notice of funding opportunity and the goal of the statute is to push fiber as far -- push high capacity internet as far as possible and to rely on other technologies to fill in the gaps where it is not economically viable.

Ms. Matsui. Absolutely.

Reliable high speed broadband access is a fundamental pillar of modern life, from rural broadband deployment to vital programs like Lifeline and E-Rate.

The Universal Service Fund has been a savior for millions of Americans. That is why I am co-leading the bipartisan, bicameral group, USF working group to find solutions and ensure USF remains resilient for years to come.

That is why I also joined the Bipartisan Congressional Advisory Committee to the Supreme Court defending the constitutionality of USF.

Mr. Donovan, as we expect a decision regarding USF in June, can you describe what the impact to your consumers will be if USF is eliminated or significantly altered by the Supreme Court?

Mr. Donovan. Certainly. And thank you for joining 28 of your colleagues on that bipartisan, bicameral brief. It was greatly appreciated. And for your ongoing work with the USF working group to provide long-term solutions to that.

I am here to ring the alarm that there will be immediate problems of connectivity for Americans, immediately if the Supreme Court ends the Universal Service Fund. This isn't waiting for systems to degrade and customers will eventually be cut off.

Those impacted that you mentioned, both in high cost areas, low income schools and libraries, there will be immediate, devastating effects.

And so if I can leave you all with one thing today, it is that Congress needs to be prepared to immediately act and to act decisively to restore this program if the Supreme Court goes in that direction.

Ms. Matsui. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Hale, do you agree?

Mr. Hale. I agree completely.

Ms. Matsui. Okay, great. Thank you very much.

And I have run out of time. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. Hudson. The gentlelady yields back.

The chair now recognizes the chair of the full committee, Mr. Guthrie -- the chair now recognizes Mr. Allen, the gentleman from Georgia -- oh, there he is.

All right. We are going to try this again.

The chair now recognizes the chair of the full committee. Mr. Guthrie, you are recognized.

The Chair. Thank you. I had to come back to see my good friend, Mr. Hale.

Mr. Hale, so Logan Telephone, or LTD Connect received support from universal fund. Would you kind of walk through for the committee what would happen, the impact on consumers? I know a lot of people have similar businesses to yours.

Tell them who Logan Telephone is and then -- it is a co-op -- and what would happen if we had -- what would be the impact on constituents and consumers.

Mr. Hale. Yes, it would be devastating for --

The Chair. It is not a for profit but it is a co-op. I want to stress that. Right?

Mr. Hale. For my company and companies like mine, you know, we are finishing up a fiber project now. Within the next few months, we will be 100 percent fiber.

And the way the Universal Service Fund works, again, as I mentioned, is the depreciation. So we have huge depreciation expenses. And if the Court ruled -- assuming it meant that USF went away completely. They are, you know, arguing primarily over the contribution factor. If USF went away completely, then we would quickly have very negative operating income.

And I am a co-op. I am a nonprofit. We don't have to make a profit, but we can't lose money every year. So it would affect the long-term viability of my company. It would affect, obviously, the broadband that we provide to customers today, which is very robust, and the customer service that we provide to our members.

The Chair. Thank you. I appreciate that.

And Mr. Spellmeyer, my understanding is, as we are talking a lot about what is happening here in D.C., and the argument is that Congress authorized the money and spend it, and the executive branch isn't spending the money that was authorized by Congress.

We are barely over 3 years, almost 4 into the BEAD program, and we know that

the executive branch is putting restrictions that Congress did not put on to spending the money. I guess we are kind of fortunate that that is the situation, because now we have the opportunity to fix it with trying to get this out.

Would you talk about what the biggest obstacles for participating in the program and the requirements, what it causes to prevent you from being able to expedite the program, participation in the program?

Mr. Spellmeyer. Absolutely, Mr. Chairman, and I would agree with you first.

The good news is this is an opportunity to reset the table and get the job done. And as I said in my statement, my members are anxious to do that.

I think the requirements that NTIA allowed the States to impose in a number of the areas that have been enumerated are particularly problematic because they raise the cost of providing the service. Be that prevailing wage rates as one. There are a whole number, as we have talked about. Climate change related items that depending upon how a State has interpreted that is causing issues.

We all are committed to affordability. We have seen some States that have gone beyond low income affordability to middle-class affordability that are causing issues. And there are a whole slew of permitting challenges that make it very difficult for my members on a day-to-day basis to build broadband.

I was talking with a provider last night from Ohio and talking about how he regularly has a slew of projects that are 3 years in the queue at utilities.

The Chair. Because of permitting reform.

Mr. Spellmeyer. Because of permitting reform.

The Chair. Permitting problems, so the need for permitting reform.

Mr. Spellmeyer. Permitting problems.

The Chair. So Mr. Hale, have you heard similar things from other providers?

Have you experienced similar things? Or has the Commonwealth of Kentucky done things that would make it difficult for us to use this program?

Mr. Hale. There have definitely been issues in the Commonwealth. There are other States that it is much worse.

The Chair. What are our issues? What is our executive branch putting on that?

Mr. Hale. Well, the environmental and historical, the timing on environmental, 7 or 8 months once you maybe get approval from projects. This is going back -- like USDA projects, reconnect.

We had issues with the Army Corps in sometimes, you know, taking 18 months to get approval to attach to an existing pole line that is already there. You just need to add anchors to string fiber. So we have had those areas.

And, you know, the business plan for the areas that are left is tough. Any provider is going to be taking a pretty good risk because we don't really know what it is going to cost to build these networks when all the money starts flowing.

The Chair. So the low hanging fruit --

Mr. Hale. So any burden that you add or any requirement that is not absolutely necessary hurts the business plan to build these last high cost areas.

The Chair. Thank you. That is helpful.

And I will yield back.

Mr. Hudson. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The chair now recognizes the ranking member of the full committee, Mr. Pallone, for 5 minutes to ask your questions.

Mr. Pallone. Thank you, Chairman Hudson.

A report from the Wall Street Journal yesterday indicated that the Department of Congress is considering changes to the BEAD program that could award nearly \$20 billion

of BEAD funds to Starlink, a service that is already available to every single American today. And anyone who wants to sign up can do so without a dime of taxpayers' money.

The BEAD program was designed to overcome barriers dividing the communities that are economically feasible to serve with private capital from the communities that are not, while also ensuring those on the wrong side of the digital divide are not subjected to second-class service.

Now, my question, I have three of them, Ms. Morris. Do you think there is an appetite among States for awarding nearly half of the BEAD program funds to satellite program providers?

Ms. Morris. Thank you, ranking member.

I have not heard that type of interest from States. I did not hear that type of interest in my time at NTIA, but I think, moreover, what I have heard from States and continue to hear from States is a desire to move these plans forward that they have spent the last 3 years working through.

They have worked through the FCC maps. They have had their initial proposals approved. They have worked through their sub-granting process and their internet service provider selection process, and some of them have submitted their final proposals and had them approved by the Assistant Secretary at NTIA.

States are on the one yard line at this point, and they just want the ability to get into the end zone, get the shovels in the ground, and get things built. And anything that will set back or create more redundant work on these plans I think will be frustrating to these State broadband offices.

Mr. Pallone. I like the football analogy.

Over the past 2 years, we heard a steady course of fearmongering from a small number of stakeholders who claim the requirements of the BEAD program were so

onerous that providers would not participate and the program would fail.

So again, Ms. Morris, what is the level of BEAD participation in States currently? And are providers refusing to participate in application rounds, or is it more robust than we were led to believe?

Ms. Morris. I mean, I think you just look at the three States that have had their final proposals approved, that have worked all the way through the 14 steps of the BEAD program laid out by Congress and to see that they have, in Louisiana, 95 percent fiber participation and other providers filling in the remainder.

Nevada also has robust fiber participation, other providers filling in the remainder, and Delaware, which was able to use all of its BEAD support to build fiber to every home.

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[2:59 p.m.]

Mr. Pallone. Okay. And then my third question -- I think it is good to hear that State broadband also says it is seeing such promising levels of participation given some of the rhetoric today. Although, I am concerned that companies will be discouraged from participating in the Trump administration's redo of BEAD, especially now that we know the Commerce Department is planning the stack the deck in favor of Elon Musk SpaceX this time around.

But the third question, Ms. Morris, if the Trump administration enforced the State and internet service providers to restart the BEAD process from square one, what effect would that have on States and providers' confidence and the future of the program, and what would that mean for consumers?

Ms. Morris. Well, I think a dramatic reset of the program that involved redoing any of significant amount of work that the States have already completed would be very challenging for States and would be -- States have invested 3 years of their time standing up broadband offices, navigating the mapping process, drafting their initial plans, working with industry in the State to get these plans to the final stages of the process. And, you know, I don't think there is any guarantee, one, that every State would continue to participate. And, you know, it is hard to say what the full impacts of the program would be if we were to walk things back that dramatically.

Mr. Pallone. All right. Thank you very much. And I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Hudson. I thank the ranking member.

The chair now recognizes the vice chairman of the subcommittee, Mr. Allen. You will be recognized for five minutes to ask your questions.

Mr. Allen. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for being here today, and as we talk about implementing this important program that we have been working on for sometime in Congress.

During my time in Congress, we have worked continuously to expand rural broadband across my district. And we have made great progress particularly with our co-ops and whatnot using the universal fund. But where we have for-profit companies, you know, obviously we are having to use other funding methods.

The BEAD program provided 65 billion in additional funds to support broadband activities. It has brought the total amount provided by Congress to broadband to well over a hundred billion dollars. BEAD was full of unnecessary requirements, and as a result not a single inch of fiber has been laid with these funds. And then all of a sudden we are talking about the new administration, which I think he got confirmed about 2 weeks ago. You know, that is interesting. But, you know, and we are seeing -- you know, Georgia right to work State. And so we are seeing now in government projects, these project labor agreements, which are very complex. In fact, if you actually have a bidder on your project, and he is the low bidder, and the government can dictate that, you know, that okay you don't have a project labor agreement, so they give it to the next contractor. I mean, are we seeing that kind of stuff in these programs, Mr. Spellmeyer?

Mr. Spellmeyer. We absolutely are, Congressman, and as I have reflected on the dialogue here, back and forth. So ACA Connects has a study we did in 2023 that I believe we shared with NTIA that estimated that the cumulative layering of all of this was approximately 60 percent additional.

Mr. Allen. Additional cost?

Mr. Spellmeyer. Additional cost.

Mr. Allen. Wow.

Mr. Spellmeyer. Well, the actual reality is as we have come further we have seen differences across the States as it is played out. But I just heard yesterday from one of my members in Pennsylvania that the prevailing wage issue there alone was driving almost a 70 percent difference in the State of Pennsylvania for my providers. There is lots of stuff out there --

Mr. Allen. As it stands now, do many ACA Connects members plan to participate in BEAD because of additional unnecessary burden.

Mr. Spellmeyer. There are some that are participating. There were many more that were initially interested. As I talked with them this week, they want to come back, and they want to come in. And the good news is I don't think we need to restart the process as has been suggested.

Mr. Allen. Right.

Mr. Spellmeyer. I think we can move expeditiously to strip out the stuff that needs to be stripped out and then get about the business of finishing it. I think NTIA could grant waivers, either through NTIA or the Department of Commerce that would allow States to proceed but remove some of the provisions.

Mr. Allen. Yeah, because we are seeing this in the DOGE effort today about the excessive costs of doing business, and a waste of taxpayer money by the Federal Government.

Mr. Hale, are you seeing the same thing in Kentucky?

Mr. Hale. Not as much. Of course we not as far along.

Mr. Allen. Right.

Mr. Hanson. But that is definitely a potential issue that we could see that we hope we don't.

Mr. Allen. What is one barrier, Mr. Hale, that you would like removed as far as

deployment is concerned either related to BEAD or not?

Mr. Hale. You know, to be honest, the Kentucky office has been open and flexible to try to follow the NTIA guidelines and not make them any more burdensome. I mean, they are walking the line. They had want to get the --

Mr. Allen. Get it done, yeah.

Mr. Hale. -- job done in Kentucky. But, obviously, the permitting -- the low-cost option, we have got a lot of flexibility in Kentucky, but there are States that don't.

Mr. Allen. Yeah.

Mr. Hale. You know, and a lot of NTCA members have problems. And it will restrict them from participating in BEAD.

Mr. Allen. How about you, Mr. Donovan?

Mr. Donovan. I think some of the workforce issues from an industry overall, we do not have the workforce that we need to complete this --

Mr. Allen. Yeah.

Mr. Donovan. -- across the country. Oh, and that is why we have been pleased to work with partners or groups like Warriors for Wireless that are helping transition vets into the wireless tower climbers programs at Nate and WI and other partners. But the bigger picture is that we need more workforce education. We need more workers in this industry.

Mr. Allen. So we have got 7 million open jobs in this country right now, and everybody is screaming about, you know, layoffs, and all of that stuff. I mean, it is ridiculous. But, anyway. All right. Well, I am out of time, and I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Hudson. Thank you. The chair now recognizes Representative Soto for five

minutes to ask your questions.

Mr. Soto. Thank you, Chairman. You know, I was proud to be able to vote for American Rescue Plan which already started delivering a rural broadband to areas of my district like Deer Park, Old Creek, Kenansville. One of my constituents even wrote Spectrum, which is doing some of this work: Good afternoon, everyone. I had to just share my excitement with you all. After an entire lifetime of not being able to have so much as a phone line at a rural Osceola County Kenansville home, as of today we now have WiFi. As I type this, Spectrum just finished installing. It is incredible to experience firsthand the very goal that we all contributed to beginning sometime ago. I know it is not complete for everyone yet, but it still is amazing.

Tiffany Chapman is on the Double C Bar Ranch in south Osceola and is sixth-generation Osceolan. And, unfortunately, my colleagues across the aisle, they all voted no on that bill. And then we got together to pass the rural broadband program that we are talking about today, the BEAD program. I would call it the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, but every single Republican on this committee also voted no on that bill. And so to hear things like suddenly now you are the champion to rural broadband, I think you guys call that fake news, right? We need to work together, and I think it is great.

Look, if we would have sped up the program, y'all would have said there was fraud or waste. Since the program was you felt too slow, now it needs to be more efficient. The reality is we had to go through maps, the State's presented plans, and we are moving forward. But I suppose it is better late than never. And we welcome the bipartisan help. The good news is that the States are ready. The plans had been approved, were cued up to deliver for rural America.

But now the Trump administration wants further reviews, further delays, and you

are still talking about Biden. I got a great name for this hearing: Stopping Trump's Broadband Plunder, as an alternate. Because we see delays. And then I am worried. Is this going to go into billionaire tax cuts? Is it going to be moved to other areas.

You know, this delay, 45 days and counting is a big concern. Now we worked both with broadband, we worked with satellite in that area, we know fiber is faster. It is costly in some areas. And so we got a balance. We saw the FCC adjust with the NTIA to allow for some satellite internet to be part of this 4.1 billion. It is even part of Florida's plan. But we know broadband is the foundation of this.

And so, Ms. Morris, the States have submitted the plans. Do you feel like they are ready to go? It seems like you think they are.

Ms. Morris. I absolutely think they are ready to go. They have invested years upon years of working in these plans, have worked with the providers in their State, have worked with other stakeholders in their State, and have worked NTIA, and are ready to get shovels in the ground as we heard from Congressman Carter from Louisiana.

Mr. Soto. Now, do you know why the funds are still frozen 45 days into the Trump administration?

Ms. Morris. I don't have any insight into how the current administration or the current leadership at the Department of Commerce is overseeing.

Mr. Soto. Have you seen any public statements by the current NTIA officials about why the funds are frozen.

Ms. Morris. Other than today right before this hearing, a desire to take another look at the program and reevaluate, no.

Mr. Soto. And what do you think this would mean as far as delays? Do we have any timetables as far as how long these delays could go? Have you seen them talk about that.

Ms. Morris. I don't have any timetables. I will say that the scale at which -- if the Wall Street Journal yesterday is correct, the scale of that shift that is proposed in that article, it is hard to know exactly how that would play out but could involve a pretty significant reset of the program and going back and asking States to redo their plans.

Mr. Soto. Based upon your experience from working at NTIA, how long do you think that could set back if they have to reassess all these plans?

Ms. Morris. Years,

Mr. Soto. So you couldn't tell us if the uncertain amount of time that we could see delays for a program, that today they are talking about there are delays. And yet what is happening right now at this very moment with the Trump administration is causing uncertain delays.

Mr. Chairman, you know, we want to work together, we want to get this done, you have rural areas, I have rural areas, a lot of my friends across the aisle have rural areas. We want to make sure this thing gets moving forward. And if we have to have States redo all these plans --

I know North Carolina, I know New York, and I know Florida would be upset by that. So I am committed to work with you and others to try to get this thing moving. And this is the challenge that faces our community today, and I yield back.

Mr. Hudson. I appreciate the gentleman, and I appreciate your comments. I look forward to working with you on this.

The chair now recognizes Representative Latta. You are recognized for five minutes to ask your questions.

Mr. Latta. Well, thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Thanks everyone for being here this afternoon, and this is a really important topic. I have been very fortunate to be on the subcommittee since the day I joined this committee back in 2010.

And we are talking broadband and getting it deployed. It is one of the things that we have talked and talked and talked about. And I think that it is important that we get this thing solved so we can get it done. Because I think we had successes out there.

There is about 8 million families across this country that don't have access to broadband. If you don't have broadband, not only for schoolwork, for telehealth -- and you think about small businesses, especially in my district -- if you don't have broadband, you are done.

So it hurts the small communities because those small communities have a problem. And, you know, all of a sudden this company goes, you know what, if I don't have broadband, how am I going to connect with the outside world.

And then I think about the connectivity we need to have for our farmers and the legislation I had in the last farm bill is important for our agricultural producers. And we want to make sure another piece I am working on right now where you think about keep moving that so our rural folks out there can have that been broadband deployed.

But, you know, the problems that we have -- and, again, before I can ask a few questions -- a report came out in 2022 from GAO that we have over 130 different programs administered by 15 different departments and agencies for broadband. It is crazy. You know, why not just have one? Could we do things faster instead of having 15 different departments and agencies? And jump our limited resources out there and fragmentation, that is a problem.

And you know, then we had the issue several years ago with the FCC maps. And they brought out the maps. And I remember I called the commission and I said I hate to tell you this when they asked us to look at the maps, he said what do you think? I said I am going to tell you what I think, they are wrong. They had like the whole entire State of Ohio being covered. And so we invested \$7 million at that time to do something

about broadband, and we are up to about \$98 million the last time I saw them making sure we had accurate maps.

And so one of the things that I would just like to ask, you know, as we have the folks here. When you think about on the broadband on deployment and those maps and with the FCC's change -- and I know when the commissions were in here in the last Congress, I asked them. I said, are the maps working? And there was pretty uniformity among the commission at that time that, you know, they thought the maps were working.

But can I just go down the line and just ask everyone a simple question. Do you think the maps are working for everyone out there right now? Mr. Spellmeyer?

Mr. Spellmeyer. My members believe that the wire line maps have been improved substantially. I have testified in front of both the House and the Senate about many challenges in the wireless world previously.

Mr. Latta. Mr. Donovan?

Mr. Donovan. I will pick that up right there. There has been a lot of improvement on wired on the fixed maps. There is a lot of work left to go on mobility. To put some data on that, in the broadband data, a set of processes to challenge these maps. So if you or your constituents know that map is not right, you have a mechanism to say, look, we have to fix this before we move forward.

There has been approximately 3.7 million challenges that were accepted on the fixed maps, and there is about 175 challenges that were accepted on mobile.

So there is about a little more than 2 million percent more challenges have been accepted. More work is left to go on the mobile maps to make sure that we can challenge them and fix them so that they can actually guide where we know mobile coverage exists.

Mr. Latta. Mr. Hale, what about you?

Mr. Hale. I would say much improved. There is still significant issues. You know, the wire line is good. It is pretty easy to report. Wireless is a little tougher and not enough accountability for companies that overstate their coverage still. There is still significant overstatement of coverage in the map.

Mr. Latta. Ms. Morris?

Ms. Morris. Just to echo what others have said. The wire line maps which is what NTIA was most primarily concerned about giving the statutory mandates to rely on them for the BEAD allocations, these are the best maps we have ever had in the history of Federal mapping. And they continue to get better with every round of challenge processes.

Mr. Latta. Thank you. And, you know, in my last 36 seconds, here is another one. You know, as I was noticing about the 14 steps that are here and about trying to get everything that everyone has to do through NTIA. I ask this question. I was back in the district, and I was at a meeting at one of my community colleges, and they are training people out there to go out there and help deploy. But one of the persons there told me something, I asked this question to NTIA later -- did anybody consider that it takes 18 months or 24 months to get a bucket truck to even get somebody up on a pole? And then how are they getting people trained.

And so I think when we are looking at what we got to do out there, we have a lot of work to get done, but this has got to get done quickly, and we just can't keep it up. And, Mr. Chairman, I have overdone my time, and I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. Hudson. I thank the gentleman.

The chair now recognizes Mr. Ruiz for five minutes to ask your questions.

Mr. Ruiz. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Today my colleagues on the other side of

the aisle can't seem to get their stories straight. On one hand, they acknowledge the need to coordinate broadband programs, which I agree with, but then criticize that broadband equity acts as in deployment or the BEAD program's timeline to claim President Biden has not acted on that digital divide. But let's talk about the facts.

Under the Biden administration, millions of Americans, especially in rural and travel communities have gained access to high-speed internet. These investments are not handouts, they are lifelines to education, healthcare, and economic opportunity. Through the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program, the Biden administration invested \$3 billion towards expanding broadband access on Tribal lands.

In my district alone, the Cabazon Band of Cahuilla Indians and the Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians received over \$820,000, and the Colorado River Indian Tribe secured \$28.4 million to connect 1,700 households to reliable high-speed internet.

But my district is not the only one benefitting. Nationwide, the Biden administration allocated over \$276 million to 44 Tribal communities across 14 States with more projects underway. These benefits don't just benefit the Tribal community. These benefits benefit all the surrounding rural areas that are neighbors to these Tribal communities.

Ms. Morris, how do Federal broadband investments under the Biden administration support economic development, education, and healthcare in Tribal communities?

Ms. Morris. Thank you for the question, Congressman. And I appreciate you highlighting the incredible work that NTIA has done to connect Tribal communities, along with other departments and agencies throughout the Federal Government, and in coordination, as you know.

There is more work to be done, more money available through the Tribal

Broadband Program, and certainly more money available through the BEAD program to help fill in where those investments have not yet occurred. And I think that is sort of stepping back for a moment. That is the beauty of the way that these Federal programs work together.

Mr. Ruiz. And so how do they develop the education, healthcare, and economic development in Tribal lands?

Ms. Morris. Well, we know that the Tribal entities face an acute divide, even more acute than many other areas.

As I noted in my oral testimony and in follow-up questions, the access to high-speed affordable internet is a precursor for economic development, access to education, access to telehealth. It is the platform on which all of these key resources live. And without connectivity, the digital divide becomes a human and basic resource divide.

Mr. Ruiz. And as you said, it enables telemedicine for remote families, online learning for students, and growth for small businesses, and travel entrepreneurs. But expansion must respect travel sovereignty and be done in true partnerships with meaningful consultation.

Last Congress I spoke out forcibly against Republican efforts in this committee to change permitting in a way that would cut Tribes out of the process. And if they want to try to tackle permitting reform again this Congress, I would suggest they reach out across the aisle and work with us. I am game to work with anybody to help bridge this digital divide, but rather than pushing forward the same old tired ideas.

Ms. Morris, can you discuss the Biden administration efforts to streamline permitting and how Tribal sovereignty was prioritized in the process?

Ms. Morris. I would just say, Congressman, that Tribal sovereignty and Tribal

consultations are bedrock to the ways in which NTIA has engaged with Tribes, whether in permitting or just the sub granting process through these areas -- repetitive grant making processes through these various grant programs. It is something that I hope to see continue at NTIA. They have a Tribal office that is made up entirely of folks who come from Tribal communities. And that I think has driven a genuine authentic commitment to ensuring that Tribal sovereignty --

Mr. Ruiz. What have y'all done to help streamline the permitting.

Ms. Morris. We have been working with other Federal agencies to identify areas where there are hurdles, whether it is something as simple as the form can't be filed electronically, it has to be filed in paper. To getting more capacity, which I think is truly the biggest hurdle here is getting the capacity in place in the permitting office, is to process permits more quickly and more efficiently. And that I think has to be part of the --

Mr. Ruiz. You know, what is interesting, I just had a meeting with the utility company. Everything has slowed down because of the mass layoffs. The personnel that was working on the permitting for wildfire prevention access and all that is gone. And so it is going to take even longer to permit, to process these permitting. But, yet, they are complaining permitting time, and they are making the problem worse. Thank you.

Ms. Morris. Thank you.

Mr. Ruiz. I yield back.

Mr. Allen. [Presiding.] Next is Representative Bilirakis from Florida. I yield 5 minutes.

Mr. Bilirakis. Thank you very much. I appreciate it, Mr. Chairman. And I appreciate the testimony today. When I first started representing Citrus County in

2021 -- that is in Florida -- one of their top three needs was reliable cell phone internet services. And that is probably true with a lot of the rural areas around the country.

In November of 2022, I filled with excitement for the anticipated community investment, the Citrus County Chronicle, one of the newspapers there, one of the major newspapers wrote two newspaper articles. One article on the promise that the BEAD program provided to the county, and the second article charging residents to review the broadband maps and report airt to ensure accurate funding availability for the county.

Sadly, the slow execution of the BEAD program means that connectivity remains a top concern. And the original hope in the program is turning to disappointment unfortunately. Meanwhile, the States have been trying to navigate the process to get the necessary applications and approvals for participation in the program.

In October, Florida's initial proposal volume two was approved by NTIA, starting another one-year clock for their State to submit a final proposal.

Mr. Spellmeyer, your written testimony outlines some specific changes to enhance the effectiveness of the BEAD program. Would enacting these changes impact the progress that the States have already made under the current program structure, or can they be folded in seamlessly?

Mr. Spellmeyer. I would agree that they would help. They would improve the program, the changes they have outlined. And I think it can be done, let's say, nearly seamlessly. I think we are talking months, not -- let's call it weeks or months, not months and years. I think they can move quickly without tremendous disruption.

Mr. Bilirakis. Well, that is encouraging. Okay. During an NTIA oversight hearing, in late 2023, I asked former assistant Secretary Davidson about the prohibition on rate regulation within the BEAD program. The IJA included a clear prohibition on rate regulation. And former Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo rearticulated that

ban at a Senate hearing that same year.

Mr. Davidson's response was the same. The law was very clear that NTIA could not regulate rates within BEAD. But, subsequently, we heard that pressures and incentives were put on States that included rate regulation in their draft proposals. This question is both for Mr. Hale and Mr. Donovan. I still have some time left. First, Mr. Donovan, your written testimony briefly mentions that policymakers should avoid pitfalls like affordability claim conditions that could negatively impact BEAD participation. Can you expand on how rate regulations harms the marketplace?

Mr. Donovan. Thank you for the question. So particularly for rural providers in these markets and at a time when universal service fund is under threat that there are external pressures that regulation that these programs can push on the carriers that they simply can't afford the business case to provide the service at certain levels without the resources through programs like USF that provide support to provide reasonable comparable services and rates for those in rural and urban areas. And so it is really important that we don't have some of those requirements without the support necessary for rural carriers to comply.

Mr. Bilirakis. Very good. Mr. Hale, do you have anything to add?

Mr. Hale. I am sorry?

Mr. Bilirakis. Do you have anything to add, please, sir?

Mr. Spellmeyer. I agree with everything Mr. Donovan just said. There is a bottom line impact. This is about cost to deploy, it is about density, and everything that you layer on makes the case worse. You want as policymakers maximum participation in this program. You want us going to the States and attempting to be the providers selected. And the more you layer on, the more difficult you make it. And that is what we are seeing play out across the country today.

Mr. Bilirakis. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate it. And I will yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Allen. I thank the gentleman for yielding. Next, I will give be five minutes of questioning to Representative Peters from California.

Mr. Peters. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, I came to Congress sometime ago. Every single Member that I talked to here, Republican and Democrat, wanted to do infrastructure. And the Republicans, in particular, were frustrated with the inability to deploy rural broadband. They were just disconnected. And one of my colleagues, she was on Transportation Committee, she said Scott, we are going to do a trillion-dollar infrastructure bill. And I just laughed at her. I said, if we could get two or \$300 million for highways, I think that would be pretty good. But lo and behold in the last couple of Congresses, we did. We got a trillion-dollar infrastructure bill. We got all of this money for rural broadband. And I just want to say that before I move on to criticizing that. That was quite an accomplishment for this place. And I know that that vote was not necessarily bipartisan, but even though Democrats controlled that vote, it was sounds like we just invested in blue areas, we vested in red areas, and rural areas mostly represented by the public. And I thought it was a really good thing.

Now, I have sat in this seat in various places on other subcommittees and criticized the Biden administration for the red tape that we did not get around. And I think that is a legitimate question to ask. And I am very frustrated with how slowly we deployed some of these investments with the money that we put in the bank. Mostly, I talk about energy, but here it is again with broadband.

And Mr. Hale, Mr. Donovan, maybe you can tell me what you think specifically would be permitting obstacles to bridging the digital divide and what we can do, from your perspective, to see that we get shovels in the ground.

Mr. Hale. Thank you, Congressman. Well, you know, I think we mentioned, you will see it in our testimony different things that can definitely affect that ability. Again, I mentioned environmental, just the length of them, and those are important things to do. But they just take --

Mr. Peters. I wouldn't know what you meant by environmental. Is that NEPA, or is that something else?

Mr. Hale. Well, I know specifically like with the reconnect program in USDA, there is an environmental process at USDA that you have to go through. I haven't been through those. A lot of my friends around the country have. That is one of the big ones. It is not the process of going through it. It is just how long it takes. We say with the Army Corps of Engineers. We have sometimes with the railroads, we have some issues, but Mr. Donovan I think probably with his knowledge of what is going on across the -- has probably got better --

Mr. Peters. I did notice that there were 17 different agencies that needed to be involved with project reviews. So I know that must be very frustrating. But go ahead, Mr. Donovan.

Mr. Donovan. Yeah, I think it is, one, it is making sure that there is the resources to process these things that come up. Things like the Broadband Incentives for Communities Act can help to provide additional resources to process it. But it is also sticking to shot clocks to exist now, to having them be actionable so that it actually matters. So that these operators have some certainty as they go through the process that if they do their part, that the Federal partners are going to be working with them on the permits. So that there is a collaborative of trying to get to done. You know, I hear from some members that they hear from local on the ground that NEPA is used as a verb. You know, if you try that, I am going to NEPA you to death. That is not the right

incentives --

Mr. Peters. Yeah, you have some of that here. I would just say this. I have never thought that just hiring more people was the way thing to go faster. I think there are process reforms we need to make things go faster. But when you fire people indiscriminately, it is go to go slow stuff down.

And what we are seeing out of DOGE now is this incredibly scatter-shot approach that is supposedly to save money. Only 4 percent of the entire Federal budget is the workforce. So you are not really going to save big money on it, but you really are going to make processes like this, processes at the IRS, you are going to make it a lot more difficult, and it is counterproductive.

I hope my colleagues on the other side know of all the people here, I really want to work to make these processes faster. I think the way we are seeing this deployment of cuts, probationary poise -- and I have seen this in the Navy, I have seen it in NIH, I have seen it in IRS -- is making it harder for Americans. Let's take a step back. Let's all agree we want to get rid of waste, fraud, and fraud abuse. Let's all agree we want to improve processes. Let's all agree we want to get rural broadband done. But the way this is happening is really counterproductive. And I would just suggest that we have the power of the purse, we also have the power to let the President know what we are hearing. And by the way, I think technological solutions might be available here as well. And we have a technologist involved at DOGE, I would much like to see him -- rather see him involved in what he knows, which is technology than what he doesn't know which is how to manage these agencies. And I yield back.

Mr. Allen. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

I now yield five minutes for my colleague from Georgia, Representative Carter.

Mr. Carter of Georgia. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I thank my colleague

from California. I know he is sincere about permitting reform, and I appreciate that very much. But let's face it the past 4 years, under the Biden-Harris administration has been nothing short of a disaster for broadband, deployment, and expansion through America. And it is because of the permitting process. Permitting delays have resulted in halting the construction of broadband infrastructure, even in my own district of Georgia in the First Congressional District.

Take for instance the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service frequently exceeding the 270-day deadline for viewing broadband permitting request on Federal lands. You know, there was a study -- listen to this now -- a study conducted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that about half of the permitting requests processed by the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service exceeded the 270-day deadline in that both agencies currently lack a method of alerting staff appropriately when the deadline is approaching.

Mr. Spellmeyer, let me ask you, how do these lengthy reviews and delays impact Americans' access to reliable and high-speed internet?

Mr. Spellmeyer. Well, as I said earlier, Congressman, you know, I have talked to providers just last night who were telling me 3 years is a regular time to sit around and wait for some of this stuff to move through. I was thinking we all live with shot clocks. I got a shot clock in front of me right now. You have got one in front of you. We have deadlines every year. I got to file on April 15. We just need -- that alone would make a huge difference.

Mr. Carter of Georgia. You know, you mentioned I believe in your opening statement, my legislation, the American Broadband Deployment Act that will streamline the broadband permitting processes. And that is a bill that focuses on standardizing regulations and expediting Federal and local approvals and improving coordination

among agencies by cutting red tape. And if we do this, these reforms will result in accelerating deployment, particularly in rural areas. You know, I am a former mayor. I will tell you, you know, it is also the locals that sometimes hold this up. And we need to address that as well. But it obviously supports economic growth.

Mr. Donovan, how would this legislation, the American Broadband Deployment Act, how would it impact your members and the industry's efforts?

Mr. Donovan. You are increasing certainty for the operators as they go into the process that they know if they get to the end of it, there will be a decision -- you can proceed with your bill or here is what you need to fix. But you are not sitting in limbo forever waiting. As my colleague said, when shot clock goes off, you need somebody to blow the whistle to make sure that that is enforced.

Mr. Carter of Georgia. Mr. Spellmeyer?

Mr. Spellmeyer. Yeah, and certainty encourages investment, and uncertainty discourages investment, and that is what we are talking about.

Mr. Carter of Georgia. No, we have just had a change in administration. I have so many companies come into my office, and they want the same thing. We need certainty. We need to understand. We need to know what the future -- in order to invest, we have got to know what the future holds and what is going to be there when it is not going to be there.

You know, I was in business for 32 years, and I will tell you without certainty, it is difficult to make business decisions. I think that is what we are up against.

Mr. Spellmeyer. As Mr. Hale said earlier, you know, he is depreciating his investments over 15, 18, 20, 30 years. And it is the same thing for my members. And it is really dangerous to make -- to ask providers to make commitments without that certainty.

Mr. Carter of Georgia. If we were to have this permitting reform bill enacted that we are talking about here, how soon would organizations like your members be able to start serving rural communities that are in need of broadband?

Mr. Spellmeyer. I am confident that we could do that by September 1 of this year.

Mr. Carter of Georgia. Mr. Donovan?

Mr. Donovan. I don't know think that the timing of these reviews actually matters a whole lot in a lot of rural America. Especially out West, there is places where you can't start the review until a certain amount of the snow is gone from the ground. It takes time to process. By the time you get the permit, you may be past your build window, and you can't get back out to those sites until the next summer.

So that is where the sequencing of this really matters if you want to take it from an exercise of going through permitting to an exercise of deploying broadband.

Mr. Carter of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I would submit to you that as many people come into our office -- and I don't care what sector of our economy you are talking about -- whether you are talking about technology, whether you are talking about healthcare, whether you are talking about energy, it is all the same. Permitting, regulations, questions, questions. That needs to be reformed. And I hope that we can get this bill passed so that we can have some reform here. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Mr. Allen. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Now I recognize Representative Dingell from Michigan for five minutes of questions.

Mrs. Dingell. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to all the witnesses for joining us. Broadband is not a luxury. It is an essential infrastructure that determines

whether families, businesses, and communities can succeed in today's economy. I strongly support continued investment in the broadband equity access and deployment need program and other broadband initiatives.

As we all know, it is bringing high-speed internet access to underserved areas by funding broadband planning, infrastructure deployment, and adoption programs in all 56 States and the U.S. territories. And we have made a lot of progress with States already implementing BEAD to expand access.

Let's be clear. The work is far from done. We have got to ensure that the Federal Government follows the law, upholds affordability measures for eligible customers, and delivers on the promise of universal broadband. All remaining committed to finding solutions that makes broadband accessible and affordable for every American.

But I am concerned that the Trump administration and my colleagues across the aisle are actively working to delay the broadband implementation to push changes that would directly benefit Elon Musk by funneling billions of taxpayer dollars into Starlink. A blatant conflict of interest.

The Department of Commerce is withholding approvals that would otherwise have shovels in the ground in States across the country. The BEAD program demands a comprehensive, efficient, and collaborative approach. We need to be thorough, thoughtful, and deliberate. Michigan's broadband office like many others across the country has worked extensively with stakeholders to craft a strategic, long-term approach to broadband expansion. However, concerns have emerged that Federal mandates or sweeping program changes at this late stage could force States to go back to square one and restart their selection processes leading to significant delays.

And State broadband offices are voicing frustrations over recent delays and BEAD

implementation with many pointing to a slowdown in the approval process at NTIA and on IST. These delays are slowing the efforts to get shovels in the ground and connect communities.

Ms. Morris, what steps could this NTIA take to speed up the approval process for State BEAD plans?

Ms. Morris. Thank you, Congresswoman. The easiest step would be just to push forward those -- that the three States who already have plans approved by NTIA are just sitting in a queue, essentially to push those through and allow the money to flow -- the money to be released and the shovel to go into the ground.

Mrs. Dingell. Michigan has led the way in leading BEAD responsibly. But Federal interference could slow or even jeopardize the program. My State is telling me this.

Ms. Morris, what are the risks if political interference continues to obstruct Federal broadband programs?

Ms. Morris. So, you know, the biggest risk I see right now is just timing and momentum. States are, as I said, at the one-yard line, and they have spent blood, sweat, and tears getting these plans drafted, approved, doing these sub award -- sub granting processes, all of which is required by the statute. They have been meticulously working through all 14 steps laid out in BEAD to get to where they are now. Any step backward, one, is going to undo -- it is going to be wasteful of all the work that they have already spent, as waste of tax dollar money. And the confusion that abounds about what that means next, I think, is exacerbating concerns within the States.

And I would also say there is risk that the more fundamental changes that we make to the program, and the more we try to rush a new plan forward, the more we risk outcomes like RDOF, which is now seeing a 37 percent default rate.

Mrs. Dingell. Thank you. Republicans are attempting to rewrite BEAD's statutory requirements to weaken its focus on high-speed future proof networks. If successful, these changes would funnel billions in taxpayer dollars to Starlink, despite its well-documented shortcomings compared to fiber broadband.

Mr. Hale, what would be the implications both today and in the long-term of allowing Starlink and other satellite providers broader access to BEAD funding? Are there any drawbacks to consumers and businesses by prioritizing satellite broadband over fiber technologies?

Mr. Hale. Yeah, I think you all know I am a fiber fan. That is what we are building. There is no technology that can match what we can provide for fiber. If we are talking about long-term, I think it is the best solution in many cases. That being said, I think you hear a common chorus that we need to use every tool to reach every American, if that is our goal.

So, you know, best thing to do is to absolutely take a long-term view of what that would mean, and I think that is best done at the State level. They know their locations better. They know their unique circumstances. They know what technologies will work. They don't know what that will be until they see applications and proposals that come forward that may include fiber.

So I think, you know, we need to use every tool in the box to get to every American. And it is going to be a different business case by State. So giving States the flexibility to do that exercise to figure out what is best long-term for citizens in that State is the best approach.

Mrs. Dingell. Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Joyce. [Presiding.] The gentlelady yields.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Florida, Dr. Dunn.

Mr. Dunn. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Americans do indeed have every form of technology at their fingertips for broadband, deployment, and related applications, including fiberoptic, fixed wireless mobile, and robust satellite systems. All are important to Florida. Thank you for those comments, Mr. Hale.

Historically, America has done a stellar job at building out telecommunications infrastructure, and much of this was done before commercial entities received any government grants to provide that service. Now we have thrown \$42 billion in broadband in taxpayer money. And like you said, we need to solve this problem. We haven't laid an inch of fiber yet. Not one single additional customer.

But, sir, so, in fact, I drive around in my district with a purely commercial satellite link in my car because reliable cell service is absent in half of my district. And I know there is plenty of healthy competition in our market to fix that.

Mr. Spellmeyer's testimony on evolving technology in the market was encouraging. Your members are providing fiber pipes to data centers, cell towers to offer all kinds of service bundles. And broadband prices have fallen from 87 cents per megabyte per second in 2015 to a mere 16 cents for a comparable service last year. Yet millions of Americans still lack any reliable access to broadband at a reliable speed. A useful speed, I should say.

We spent 65 billion in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the IJJA, to support broadband activities, and we have nothing to show for it. We have a poster that shows how much money was put into a number of these different programs.

Now, these aren't all of the programs. This is just some of the bigger ones. In fact, there are over 130 programs. Somebody made reference to that earlier. And, you know, we have that much money sluicing around in the system. We wonder if there is a bit of a boondoggle gold rush going on here.

Most concerning is that the Biden administration allocated infrastructure, the IJA money, the largest appropriations to date, without any accounting for other broadband programs already existing.

Yeah, I think it illustrates in some ways how complex the broadband ecosystem actually is between the big ISP's rural co-op cable company, et cetera. Hard to serve areas still don't get the broadband on a priority basis. Now the truth of the matter is that connection underserved areas can be difficult and not economically viable. So, you know, that is true in Florida, in any rural district, as it is in Latin America, Asia, Africa, et cetera.

Satellite broadband is affordable. It can be deployed today. It can be, you know, offered at a much lower cost price to try to drag a fiber to every single farm in my district. And these are remote areas.

Another advantage is resilience. Satellites are not vulnerable to having a wayward Chinese ship dragging anchor across their fiber in the bottom of the ocean.

Ms. Morris, I understand NTIA finally amended the implementation of the requirements to allow alternate technology to fiber for locations that are difficult to reach by fiber. I guess that is better late than never. I am supportive of the chairman's bill, which I co-sponsored to reform the BEAD program allowing full access for alternative technologies. You know, it is in a word technology agnostic. And I am okay with that. I think that is the way we should be. Mr. Hale's comments, I think, underscore that. The all-technology eligible section in a speed for BEAD bill allows an eligible entity to deploy reliable broadband service through any technology that meets the performance criteria.

Now, the question, Ms. Morris, is that how did the Biden NTIA, the Department of Commerce plan to ensure that there is -- that needed broadband -- and, you know,

obviously, satellite was the obvious answer. You know, you can't drag a fiber everywhere. How in the last administration were you planning to address those people?

Ms. Morris. I am sorry, I couldn't hear the last part of the question.

Mr. Dunn. Well, your BEAD program by regulation, by edict did not include anything other than fiber in the last administration. And there is places in the world -- think Pacific island nations. It just makes sense.

Ms. Morris. Sure, Congressman. Thank you for the question. The NTIA, within the BEAD program, did contemplate a wide variety of types of networks to be participants in the program. And as you note, the alternative technology guidance that came out in early January of this year further clarified the ways in which satellite companies, in particular, along with other alternative technologies could participate and were expected to participate in the program.

We see -- NTIA has historically seen that the primary goal is to push fiber as far as possible and economically feasible, but certainly to support other technologies. That makes sense in the areas where they make sense.

Mr. Dunn. So my time has expired, but I would say we ought to be just technology agnostic. Tomorrow, some right person is going to invent something we haven't thought of today. With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. Joyce. The gentleman yields.

The chair now recognizes Ms. Barragan from California for five minutes.

Ms. Barragan. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to thank the witnesses for being here today. It is a little challenging to sit in this hearing and hear my Republican colleagues criticize something they didn't even support. We are talking about delays. The BEAD program is even there as an option because of the infrastructure bill. Because

the last -- the first time this President was there promised an infrastructure bill and couldn't get it done. And House Democrats were able to get it done. And now they have no problem when there is an infrastructure project approved going on their television set and trying to take credit for it. And now House Democrats have invested in broadband.

Now, one of my colleagues across the aisle just said, we already have 15 programs, I don't know why we need another one. Like why don't we just have one.

Ms. Morris, is there a benefit to the BEAD program? Why can't it just be -- why can't that money just be somewhere else? Or why do we only need one?

Ms. Morris. So the way -- it is right to acknowledge that there are a variety of funding programs with a variety of purposes that are funding high-speed internet investments throughout the country all with different goals. Some with specific rural goals, some with Tribal goals, some with digital equity goals. And they are all working in concert together. And I will say that in my time at NTIA I saw some of the closest and most integrated partnership across the Federal agencies and departments that are tasked with this money to make sure that the money was spent wisely, efficiently, and that programs like the BEAD program, which Congress recognized would take a long time to implement, could be the cleanup batter when it comes to finally connecting the last remaining locations that had not been served.

So, you know, on some ways we are at the mercy of the way Congress passed the laws, and it is the way that they are directed to different agencies and partnerships. So in other words, it creates a lot of opportunity for agencies and departments to work together to leverage these different sources of money and to do what we have never been able to do and have at this moment the opportunity to do which is finally close the digital divide once and for all.

Ms. Barragan. And is it my understanding that the State of Louisiana is on the doorstep of actually being able to get these dollars and put it into effect?

Ms. Morris. More than on the doorstep. Their final proposal has already been approved. It is sitting with NIST. I don't know if there is employees to remove the special award condition that is holding it up, but that is the step that needs to be taken.

Ms. Barragan. Yeah, so it sounds to me like that always is a program critically needed. But even States like Louisiana felt it is needed and is on the verge or could be on the verge if it were not for this administration putting a hold and delaying of this program. And it is no surprise to me that Republicans want to weaken the protections around BEAD to funnel taxpayer money to Elon Musk. We have already seen this scheme play out with the FAA.

You know, last week Elon Musk falsely claimed on X that Verizon failed to meet the conditions of its \$2.4 million FAA contract to upgrade air traffic control systems. According to press reports, the FAA is now considering the contract over to Musk Starlink. This news comes merely weeks after Musk DOGE accessed the FAA's sensitive information and systems. There is a word for this. It is corruption.

Ms. Morris, given Elon Musk influence over Federal agencies that regulate his businesses, how can we ensure that BEAD funding is put toward actual broadband infrastructure as currently planned rather than diverted to any one individual or company?

Ms. Morris. So there is a couple of ways in which I will answer your question, Congresswoman. I think it is critically important to look to the States that have been doing this work for the past 3 years and ask them what they need, what they want to do, what they have plan to do. And to the extent that they are prepared to move forward to either the next phase and the 14-step process or to the finish line, or the end zone,

given an earlier metaphor, that we give them the tools to do it.

Second, I think Congress has an important role to play in making sure that the BEAD program, which has been teed up to be spent very soon is spent wisely and carefully and doesn't fall into the same traps that we have seen time and time again over the years in investments in broadband, infrastructure, and the space. See again RDOF.

Ms. Barragan. Thank you. I also understand that our chair's own home State of North Carolina is projected to create 6,100 jobs that would provide vital economic opportunities for middle class and working families. That these jobs are stuck in limbo, and with today's announcement that there is going to be a review of the program. That is only going to cause further delays. I don't know understand why we don't have more champions trying to make sure this program continues and stays on schedule as is. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. Allen. [Presiding.] Thank you for yielding.

The chair now recognizes Representative Joyce for five minutes of questions.

Mr. Joyce. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thanks for our witnesses for testifying here today. In Pennsylvania's 13th Congressional District, over 25,000 households lack connection to high-speed internet. Since joining this subcommittee my priority has been clear: Connect each and every one of these households to affordable, reliable high-speed internet.

Repeatedly, I have heard from providers and my colleagues about the critical role of the BEAD program. I share that goal. Yet despite the last administration's pumping over \$40 billion into the program, not one shovel has been put into the ground. Why is that? The regulatory red tape that the Biden administration has tied to the funding is the answer.

Back home in Pennsylvania, the Biden administration's self-sabotage is on full

display. The Biden administration's BEAD wage requirements have, in fact, tied the hands of the very agency tasked with implementing the BEAD program in the commonwealth by forcing applicants to pay workers at the highly skilled electric lineman rate of almost \$90 an hour versus the traditional rate of \$60 an hour paid to telecommunications technicians.

If you are forcing program participants to pay a 50 percent premium in labor and overhead to even be eligible for the BEAD dollars, you have already, in effect, limited the universe of applicants and eliminated smaller providers and contractors from the bidding process -- smaller providers and contractors that often reach into rural America where I represent.

Mr. Spellmeyer, in your written testimony, you offer an example of an ACA Connects member who applied for BEAD funding and reported that compliance with the program's requirements would carry a 70 percent increase in per mile deployment cost above those comparable projects funded through the Department of Treasury's Capital Project Funds. So we recognize that. How can we say that the BEAD system is helping lower the cost of broadband deployment in rural American when the government itself is adding so many additional expenses to the deployment process?

Mr. Spellmeyer. Congressman, thank you for your leadership on this issue. I think I would acknowledge that to date it hasn't helped because dollars haven't flowed. Pennsylvania, unfortunately, is the poster child, worst case of how the requirements have been layered on and adopted -- proposed by the State and adopted by NTIA.

The good news is I do think we can -- as I have said several times here -- we can fix this. I don't think it is a debate between do nothing, do everything. I think -- or start over. I think a quick set of waivers --

Mr. Joyce. Do you feel we can fix this by passing Chairman Hudson's legislation?

Is this a pathway to success?

Mr. Spellmeyer. I do. We support the legislation.

Mr. Joyce. Thank you. I as well.

Mr. Hale, what has been the immediate impact on providers who are looking to or currently operate in the State's BEAD programs that have prevailing wage?

Mr. Hale. It just hurts the business case again. These are market failure areas. You are really needing to have a great business case to serve them, and prevailing wage hurts that.

And I am going to tell you. You know, wages jumped after COVID. And if this money starts rolling, there is not enough contractors and workforce out there, those wages are going to go up anyway, to be honest. So I think the prevailing wage is unnecessary.

Mr. Joyce. So you are saying that the market should determine the wage?

Mr. Hale. The market will. It will push --

Mr. Joyce. Thank you. I agree with that.

Mr. Hale. -- Not enough there.

Mr. Joyce. Mr. Spellmeyer, what reforms can we make to ensure that States are following and adopting any potential labor reforms to the point that we are discussing?

RPTR KERR

EDTR HUMKE

[3:57 p.m.]

Mr. Spellmeyer. That is a great question, and, to be honest, I haven't given it the level of thought that wish I could have in advance. I think there is -- NTIA controls the money. NTIA has got the money. They can make sure that the States follow however NTIA interprets it, and that would be a function of the current commerce department, to make sure that it does get followed. And if it doesn't, the money doesn't flow.

There would be other problems if the money didn't flow, but I think States will enforce the provisions.

Mr. Joyce. Thank you.

I have one goal and that is to connect those households in my Pennsylvania district to the internet, and if there is a common sense solution that can eliminate the hurdles that stand in the way of achieving that goal, then we owe it to our constituents and to the parents in my district who take their kids to the Sheetz convenience store so they can log on to do their homework because that is where there is Wifi.

We owe it to all of America to get shovels in the ground. We need to get America connected. We need to allow the farmers, the educators, and all of those involved to have the connectivity that they deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I yield back.

Mr. Allen. [Presiding.] I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Now the chair recognizes Representative Carter from Louisiana.

Mr. Carter of Louisiana. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And what a perfect segue to hear my colleague say that we need to have shovels in the ground. Wow! Louisiana is just a stone's throw away from shovels in the

ground.

Louisiana is a perfect example and demonstrative of this being a bipartisan issue and not one that is partisan. The program started under the Biden administration, started implementation under the Democratic governor, John Bel Edwards, and has since been moving with warp speed under the Republican governor, Jeff Landry.

And I will quote. Jeff Landry said that the BEAD program is a generational investment that will create thousands of jobs, drive billions in economic growth, and transforms Louisiana communities in all 64 parishes. Ready to have shovels in the ground.

However, since the Trump administration took office, just a week after Louisiana received its final approval, the commerce committee has withheld final funding approval that would otherwise put shovels in the ground, and we would be moving forward.

Yet, we find a way to take something that is clearly bipartisan and somehow want to make it partisan. Take something that Louisiana has demonstrated our ability to work together, Republican and Democrat, to have a smooth transition to bring fiber to all parts of our State.

This is one of those matters that we have such a clear example of how it is working. So why do we want to stop it? It is moving. Why do we want to stop it?

A question for Ms. Morris. Ms. Morris, can you tell us about the time, detail, and planning that goes into creating the States' BEAD deployment plan? And what happens if this administration starts pulling threads that make the fabric of these plans and awards, specifically for States like Louisiana who is ready to go?

Ms. Morris. Thank you, Congressman.

As I have referenced, there is a very detailed process laid out in the statute that States must follow in order to get their full funding, essentially unlocked and approved

and ready to go.

Each of those steps has different equities. Some of them are outside of the State -- inside the State's control, like the mapping process, which took a year for the FCC's maps to -- initial maps to be released. Others are a factor of, you know, the unique characteristics of the State.

There is, you know, States will draft their plans. They will submit them for approval. There is usually back and forth to try to help get to a workable place within the construct of the statute for the BEAD implementation. And States have navigated all of that. They have spent hours upon hours.

Mr. Carter of Louisiana. So given that we have done all of that, and we were literally ready to put shovels into the ground, any delay that stops and starts over will likely cost more money, not less.

Ms. Morris. Will likely cost more money.

And if we are talking about something like reclassifying satellite or other services as reliable broadband, States could not only have to redo their entire bids, but it raises questions about whether or not locations are even available to be served under --

Mr. Carter of Louisiana. So we would actually go backwards. Thank you.

Mr. Hale, based on your experience managing small fiber-based companies, what challenges do the internet service providers and contractors that have received awards -- rewards in Louisiana to this moment, what will that do to them?

Mr. Hale. Well, I would just say in general that --

Mr. Carter of Louisiana. I have got a minute. So just say it quickly.

Mr. Hale. We think there needs to be a recalibration, not a restructure, and that should happen quickly to move forward for providers. That recalibration --

Mr. Carter of Louisiana. Is there a risk that we go backwards?

Mr. Hale. There is risk that you go backwards, but, you know, it may cost a little bit more, but the final result could be improved. So that is the recalibration I am talking about. But it should happen very quickly, especially in Louisiana.

Mr. Carter of Louisiana. Mr. Donovan, how would this affect your company's efforts to connect underserved communities if BEAD funding was eliminated?

Mr. Donovan. If it was eliminated?

Mr. Carter of Louisiana. Yes.

Mr. Donovan. You would be removing a significant investment to connect everyone using fiber.

And I don't know how we got this far without giving credit to the Louisiana plan of the -- credit of the GUMBO plan, which is a great name for it.

Mr. Carter of Louisiana. Thank you.

Mr. Donovan. But of using that, of using fiber, of using fixed wireless, of using satellite where it is necessary, but using all of those tools.

Mr. Carter of Louisiana. And Louisiana is leading the way and very proud of that fact. And I am very proud of the fact that every single one of our congressional districts, two Democrat and four Republican, will benefit greatly, particularly in these rural areas. Everyone wins.

And I will tell you this program has been heralded by Republicans and Democrats in my State, and I urge us to not go backwards in making this partisan when, in fact, it should be.

Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Mr. Allen. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Votes have been called, but we are going to go to Mr. Pfluger.

And the chair recognizes Mr. Pfluger for 5 minutes of questioning, and then we

will go to votes.

Mr. Pfluger. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Donovan, I want to say thank you for your help and the support in last year's Congress on the supporting National Security with Spectrum Act. I really appreciate what you all were able to do.

I will quickly go -- and I know several of my colleagues have talked about this, but Mr. Spellmeyer, we were talking about, you know, for 1,200 days, not a single dollar of the 42 plus billion has been spent on broadband deployment. And, you know, look, part of the reason for this delay, was the Biden administration's effort to force States to adopt union workforce agreements, climate change provisions, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

And in Texas, in the BEAD plan, the prevailing wage requirement, which would increase labor cost by 20 to 30 percent for rural internet service providers and prevent them from participating in the program.

So my question is if one of my constituents wanted to know if the NTIA required Texas to include prevailing wage requirements or climate assessments that could serve as barriers to deployment, where could they see that information? I mean, how do they know? It is a very specific question but any --

Mr. Spellmeyer. I am not as fluent with the Texas negotiations that have gone on, and perhaps Ms. Morris can allude to that a little bit, but I would think that would be inside the plan itself as it sits out there today.

A number of States have agreed to move forward on prevailing wage proposals that we think have done nothing but delay and raise the cost.

Mr. Pfluger. And I think that is kind of the expected reply is that we just don't know in a lot these -- what a lot of these States are doing. Not just State to State but also just the plan is complex, and there is a lack of accountability.

And I want to highlight that I have a broadband bill -- excuse me, a Broadband Buildout Accountability Act that would help us with these kinds of things. Because that is a lot of money, \$42.5 billion, and to not have accountability for what is happening besides just planning but is actually not building out and not helping rural Texas, that is unacceptable.

You know what, I am going to yield at this point in time to -- we said we would split the time here before votes -- to Mr. Fulcher.

Mr. Fulcher. Thank you, Congressman Pfluger.

And I am going to deviate here because of the conversation.

Permitting is clearly a huge massive issue, and in my State, we have a tremendous amount of Federal lands, and so that even makes it more complex.

But I have got a technology question that, as far as I know, hasn't been raised. And, frankly, I should probably know the answer to this, but if I don't, chances are some other people don't either.

But I know we have got to have certain backbone requirements to handle bandwidth and all that kind of stuff. I will ask Mr. Donovan. Technology-wise, with all of the struggles we have with permitting across terrestrial sites, where does wireless and satellite fit? And how far away is the technology where some of that can be infrastructural backbone?

Mr. Donovan. So both satellite and fixed wireless technologies have come a long way in recent years. And so that is where, especially with permitting, fixed wireless is a really important tool here, where if you can bring fiber to the tower, you can then serve the surrounding areas of that with a fixed wireless solution, to provide the speeds that are, in many instances, comparable. But you are able to get those speeds and get that service to your constituents much faster.

And especially in States like yours where there is some challenging geographic terrain, there are some places that you are never going to string fiber, and that is where wireless is an important tool to be able to serve everyone.

Mr. Fulcher. Mr. Spellmeyer, in the last minute, I know you have talked about this, but I will just try to use this and say your input, especially on permitting needs for Federal land access.

Mr. Spellmeyer. Yes. We have members that serve your State and a number of similarly situated States. It is a huge issue.

I was talking this morning with a former member of this committee, Senator Curtis, about the impact in Utah and the need to fix it there. Anything we can do to speed that along is huge.

As Mr. Donovan just alluded to, and I think he would agree, even on the wireless side, permitting reform is still needed there, too. We have got to fix this. There are a variety of technologies that can serve, but they all face, to one degree or another, permitting challenges that have to be addressed, as I talked about shock clocks before.

Mr. Fulcher. Well, speaking of shock clocks, mine is up.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back. I yielded to Congressman Pfluger.

Mr. Allen. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

And my apologies to our panel. We have to go to votes.

I remind the members that we have been reminded we have got 20 minutes. So we have got to get down there.

And we will reconvene maximum 15 minutes after the last vote, but if you can get back here quickly, we will get started.

Thank you.

[Recess.]

Mrs. Houchin. [Presiding.] The hearing will be called to order.

The chair now recognizes Ms. Cammack of Florida for 5 minutes for questions.

Mrs. Cammack. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, for holding this important hearing today.

And thank you very much for our witnesses for hanging in there with us. It is always a fun experience when votes get called in the middle of a hearing, and I am sure you appreciated the reprieve. So, yes, Mr. Spellmeyer. I can see you were very appreciative of the break.

So as my colleagues have stated today, we are all collectively very concerned about the broadband, really the spectrum of the broadband programs that are spread across the Federal Government. Now, according to GAO, over 130 programs at 15 different agencies.

Now, I know that many of them have different standards and eligibility criteria, too. And at the very least, we can make sure that they have the same requirements.

Now, I tried to do this for the U.S. GAO Reconnect program last Congress with my Rural Internet Improvement Act.

Mr. Spellmeyer, Mr. Hale, how should Congress try to standardize requirements for the different broadband programs across the various agencies? I would love to hear your feedback on this.

And I will start with you, Mr. Spellmeyer.

Mr. Spellmeyer. Thank you, congresswoman.

Certainly, the GAO report -- I think it was the GAO report --

Ms. Cammack. Yes.

Mr. Spellmeyer. -- that you just referenced -- was quite eye opening, even to those of us in the industry who are familiar with the programs, to see them all detailed.

There is a need for standardization and streamlining.

I think part of my answer to that would be conduct a review. Do it through regular order here in the committee. Figure out what the programs are.

Congress has a habit of, you know, throwing one program on over here and then somebody else throws it over there, and pretty soon you have got 113 programs. I think it would be useful to streamline and combine some of those. Some of them are no longer I think completely relevant.

Mrs. Cammack. Right. So consolidation.

Mr. Spellmeyer. My message earlier was let's streamline the BEAD program and get back to work putting fiber in the ground and using the other technologies that are out there.

Mrs. Cammack. Excellent. Thank you.

Mr. Hale?

Mr. Hale. Yes, I would agree that they should be streamlined. It would be helpful to have a common definition, a well thought-out definition of what broadband needs are currently, as well as into the future.

We talked about the programs a little bit earlier, and, you know, just to clarify, the USF is not appropriated. That is the essential program to make sure that networks are built, sustained, and remain affordable. And then, of course, the BEAD programs, the grant programs come along for a greater capital infusion when you have still got market failure areas where USF doesn't work.

So a combination -- you know, the USF program would be the best place to establish those guidelines, those standards. And, you know, if USDA has some projects, which have been very helpful in closing the digital divide, if they could be the same standards, that would be perfect.

Mrs. Cammack. Thank you.

And Mr. Donovan, what about wireless?

Mr. Donovan. Well, I think it is important to recognize that with those different programs, that there is an inherent difference in fixed connectivity and mobile. And Americans want to have access at home but also on their devices as you are not connected to a fixed connection. And so making sure that you don't lump those different programs together. You need both of them to have those two different uses and purposes.

And as my colleague mentioned, looking at also the difference of what is a deployment program versus what is a program to sustain that deployment.

Ms. Cammack. Okay.

Mr. Donovan. Because ultimately, there is no future proof technology of any kind if there isn't sustained involvement, sustained investment to keep it going.

Mrs. Cammack. Okay. Perfect.

Mr. Spellmeyer, NTIA added some pretty onerous labor requirements to BEAD. Now, do you think that these requirements make it easier or harder to find skilled workers needed to build these broadband networks?

Mr. Spellmeyer. Well, there is no doubt in my mind that they make it significantly more difficult to find skilled workers.

And I should have added in response to your first question, I think the other thing you have to sort out is what agency is going to administer what program. That is a real challenge.

Mrs. Cammack. Well, and kind of going back to you what said, Mr. Donovan, would you agree that the requirements that we are trying to create some uniformity for across the broadband program should apply and have some -- maybe synchronicity isn't

the right word, but there should be some sort of mirror in the wireless realm?

Mr. Donovan. Yes, and it should be based on what consumers are actually expecting to receive. It is a big problem we have in the current 5G fund at the FCC is that there is an artificially low speed threshold. That means that you are not going to --

Mrs. Cammack. You don't say. Like dial up speed.

Mr. Donovan. We could use your help fixing that when the program moves forward.

Mrs. Cammack. Well, on behalf of basically every American in the United States, we will do everything possible to increase the upload/download speeds that are so desperately needed to be updated.

So thank you all so much for your time.

My time has expired. I yield.

Mrs. Houchin. The chair now recognizes Mr. Menendez from New Jersey for 5 minutes for questions.

Mr. Menendez. Thank you, chairwoman.

Access to reliable, high speed internet is as integral to educational and job success as access to textbooks or transportation. Connectivity allows students to learn, entrepreneurs to run small businesses, workers to access training and job opportunities, and for families to connect.

But Republicans left working families in a lurch last year after they refused to extend the affordable connectivity program, a lifeline that connected people across the country with internet services, including 338,000 families in New Jersey.

Thankfully, the FCC stepped up, after the ACP lapsed, to modernize the schools' and libraries' programs of the Universal Service Fund, also known as E-rate, to help our constituents get connected at home through hotspot lending. This service is

transformative.

Learning isn't one-size-fits-all, and students need access to digital tools outside of traditional working hours, at schools, and libraries. Extending access to broadband at home can change and has changed lives. And as classes and skill building increasingly rely on virtual classrooms and digital textbooks, students and teachers need to be connected at home to keep from falling behind.

Without broadband at home, completing homework is nearly impossible, forcing students to fast-food restaurants or library parking lots after hours just to get a Wi-Fi signal. Thankfully, with hotspots, it doesn't have to be this way anymore.

In my district right now, schools and libraries, like the Guttenberg School District and Elizabeth Public Library system are taking advantage of this new service provided through the E-Rate program by applying for hotspots and service to help families in New Jersey's Eighth Congressional District.

And 1,200 schools and libraries across the country are currently applying for close to one million hotspots. That is one million families that could have access to a brighter future because of this innovative modernization of the E-Rate program.

Unfortunately, like some of the other groundbreaking broadband programs we have discussed today, this program is under threat by Republicans who have introduced CRAs in both chambers to repeal this FCC action and prevent libraries and schools from getting access to these hotspots.

And I appreciate earlier my colleague, Mr. Joyce, referring to students in his district having to use parking lots to access Wi-Fi. I would hate to think and I do hate to think of the kids in his district sitting at Sheetz in the evenings to do homework, as I wouldn't want that for my constituents or any of my colleagues' constituents.

Luckily, we have seen those cases plummet because of the FCC's hotspot lending

program. So I hope he and all of my colleagues will join me in fighting against efforts to pass a CRA that would undo that progress.

It is difficult to imagine why they would want to set our students back to the days of sitting for hours in parking lots just to keep up in school, but that is exactly what they are trying to do. This would make their own constituents worse off.

Ms. Morris, you have spoken extensively about how our broadband programs are designed to work together to address aspects of the digital divide. Can you explain how the FCC's modernization of the E-Rate program helps keep families connected at home?

Ms. Morris. Thank you, congresswoman.

Yes, I mean, this seems to me to be a no-brainer, particularly, you know, while we are waiting to see BEAD through the finish line, when hopefully all of your homes in your districts will be connected to an affordable, high capacity connection, hotspots are an incredibly useful tool to provide connectivity for students. And I would hope that it remains a program that could be viable for some time.

I would also note that the CRA is a pretty blunt tool and has a preclusive effect from agencies implementing a similar rule down the road. And, you know, in this case, I think the preclusive effect of getting kids help with their homework connectivity is a particularly sharp one.

Mr. Menendez. Yes, I agree. And especially with the learning laws that people are already challenged with after COVID, we shouldn't make it an additional burden to access the educational opportunities that exist but are only accessible through a hotspot. So I agree with you there.

If congressional Republicans successfully end this FCC program to support hotspot lending, what will be the impact on students and library patrons in districts like mine?

Ms. Morris. Well, it would just make it much harder for students to do their

homework. It would put the burden on libraries to carry that water and would likely have a dramatic effect on the success of these students in their schools.

Mr. Menendez. I will give you a second on that, and I appreciate your answer.

And speaking of water, please have a sip. Take care.

Hotspot lending should not be partisan. We can all agree that kids shouldn't be forced to sit in the fast-food parking lots late at night to be able to do their homework. In fact, schools and libraries in 46 States have submitted hotspot applications. So this is applicable across the country, in red and blue districts, to help families across the country.

I urge my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to recognize the tremendous benefits of this program and to abandon any efforts to destroy it.

Thank you.

With that, I yield back.

Mrs. Houchin. Thank you, Mr. Menendez.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for the purpose of questions.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Back in the Indiana State senate, I worked on broadband legislation, trying to get access to unserved areas. As noted in some of your testimonies, we have seen overbuilding and technologies that are picking winners and losers in some of these funding opportunities.

And one of the things that I wanted to do is make sure that any broadband that was deployed went to areas that had zero access first, and then we would build toward higher speeds.

I happen to serve in the Indiana State senate in one of the most unserved areas of the State of Indiana for access to broadband. Leaving my part of the State adds an

extreme disadvantage when it comes to economic opportunities, precision agriculture, telehealth, and also education, small businesses. You name it, we were at a disadvantage.

I was once speaking to a high school group, and I asked this high school in my district if they knew where the most unserved area of the State was for broadband access, and a student raised his hand and said, my backyard. And it was just that.

In fact, when BEAD -- when the notice of funding opportunity came out, I sent a letter to both NTIA and our governor in September of 2023, sharing my concerns with the funding opportunity. And of particular concern were the mandates that I thought could delay and complicate deployment of funds, which I understand we have seen.

So I would ask Mr. Spellmeyer how much broadband funding after BEAD passed 3 years ago, how much broadband funding has been distributed to date?

Mr. Spellmeyer. Under the BEAD program, my understanding is that answer is zero.

Mrs. Houchin. Zero.

Mr. Donovan, how much broadband funding has been distributed to date?

Mr. Donovan. That has been distributed to the States, is my understanding, but has not yet gone to providers to provide services.

Mrs. Houchin. So the very thing that many of you raised concerns about and that I raised concerns about seems to be a part of, at least in part of the problem.

Another concern of mine was the notice of funding opportunity's general prohibition on non-fiber projects. It is explicitly in conflict with Congress' intent for the funding to be technology neutral, and it would likely impact deployment.

State flexibility and prioritization, consistent with the law, should be protected, and it included flexibility with the workforce necessary to execute the projects, which the

funding opportunity did not provide.

Making sure that internet access is available to unserved communities first remains a top priority of mine as we work to try to figure out some of these issues, including the great number of different broadband programs we have throughout the Federal Government and streamlining that so we can make sure that broadband resources are utilized to get to these unserved areas and make sure that citizens in the unserved areas not only are connected but are connected at the highest speeds possible to compete globally in the economy.

So I appreciate your written testimony. I do have a couple questions with the remaining time.

Coverage for our broadband maps seems to be a real issue, particularly for precision agriculture and agriculture land. Our mobile coverage is lacking. Do you think it is possible we can improve the coverage maps to better show what areas are agricultural and what is necessary to build it out?

And I will put that question to Mr. Donovan.

Mr. Donovan. We have to, right. If we move forward with these programs with there is overstated coverage, especially over agricultural ranchlands, then you are going to continue to be unserved and unavailable to use the latest technologies.

Mrs. Houchin. So Mr. Donovan, I want to talk about the 5G fund. I understand that CCA has concerns with how the Biden FCC structured the program. You outline some of that in your testimony. You say the way the program is structured could unintentionally lead to mobile connectivity in rural areas that would be worse than what is currently available.

What do you mean by that?

Mr. Donovan. So as it is currently structured, there are some places that have

service today because of USF support, where USF has been invested to it. But if the speed thresholds for what can qualify for the program are artificially set, then places that only have service today because of USF will be ineligible for the 5G fund.

So you will apply all the money into some super expensive sites in the most remote areas where maybe satellite is the best way to serve it. Meanwhile, the places that rely on USF to stay online today are going to go dark. This will lead to rusty towers and less service.

Mrs. Houchin. Thank you.

With the remaining time I have, Mr. Spellmeyer, is it your impression that the labor requirements in BEAD have impacted deployment?

Mr. Spellmeyer. Unquestionably.

Mrs. Houchin. Thank you.

I would like to submit for the record both letters that I sent not only to our governor but also to the NTIA, submit those letters to the record.

Without objection.

Thank you.

I will now recognize Ms. McClellan of Virginia for 5 minutes for the purpose of questions.

Ms. McClellan. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The good news here is there are a lot of areas where this is universal agreement. We agree that universal broadband is as necessary today as universal electrification was in the beginning of the 30s and universal service for the old landline telephone was.

Broadband has basically replaced our landline telephones, but it also ensures that we can have the most up-to-date and highest technology in a wide variety of places.

We agree that every community should have access to affordable, reliable high

speed internet services that can adapt to ever-increasing demand, and that we don't want our rural and low income communities to get the short end of the stick for reliability and affordability.

But building a broadband network is complicated. It is more complicated, I would argue, than building highways and bridges and roads because the broadband network can become obsolete that much more quickly.

So let's talk about the reason for the BEAD delays. We hear from our Republican colleagues that they are worried about waste, and we agree, and so we wanted to make sure that Federal funding through the BEAD program was used to build out unserved areas. I have heard that a couple of times.

It is not permitting delays that have caused the delay up to now, because you don't get a permit until you know where you are putting your equipment, and you don't know where you are putting your equipment until you know who is unserved.

So that was why the act said FCC build a map that will be the starting point for how money is allocated, to who, and where. But the FCC doesn't know who is served. They don't know where the networks are, and they don't know what is in the pipeline to be built. So they needed to get that information from the broadband providers. That is a complicated process I don't have time to go into, but let's just say it took a long time. It took a year.

Then, because we want to make sure we are not going to overbuild and waste money, there was a challenge process led by the States. That took 6 months.

As we did with the communications, the telecommunications infrastructure, we left to the States the primary responsibility of figuring out how to allocate this money. That is appropriate.

States were all over the map. Some States, like Virginia, had broadband offices,

had programs that were already giving out grants to build networks. Other States had to start from scratch.

States are public entities, and when they take public actions, they have to follow open record laws, open meeting laws so that they can get input from the public so that the public can be sure what the requirements are going to be in whatever plan they ultimately adopt. That takes time. Public notice, et cetera.

That was a 6-month process just to do the challenge process, but at the same time, before they could get to the challenge process, they have got to build up the broadband capacity, bring the stakeholders together, et cetera, et cetera. So that is what has happened in the first year and a half.

Once you get the map, then you build your plan. Once you know who needs the broadband, then you build the plan for how to get it there. That is what has been happening in the rest of the time. Not permitting, because there is no nothing to get a permit for yet.

Now, there has been a lot of discussion about should this be technology neutrality. The act says that whatever Federal dollars are spent on needs to be scalable and reliable.

Scalable means it needs to meet demand. What we are talking about are the upload speeds and download speeds of everything from healthcare infrastructure or information to the infrastructure for a manufacturing plant to my son playing video games on his phone all happening at the same time.

So you need to make sure you have a network that is reliable and sustainable no matter what the weather.

Fiber, in most cases, meets that need more than in other cases. And so what the act does is say whatever the technology is, we want you to choose the one that is the

most reliable. That may be one thing today, but build a plan that is future proof, so we can build a network that is future proof, so that when we spend Federal money, we don't waste it on something that is obsolete tomorrow.

Now, I don't have a question. I just wanted to make sure that we all understand the starting point of what we are and are not talking about when we decide what changes need to be made to be and what the long-term implications will be.

And I yield back.

Mrs. Houchin. The gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Fry, is recognized for 5 minutes for questions.

Mr. Fry. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you to all our witnesses for being here.

I actually have really enjoyed the testimony. I know we have been bouncing around when we were on the floor, but it has been really good as a new member of the committee to hear.

Broadband is critical. It is absolutely essential to our students, our healthcare provides, our rural communities. We have got some folks that are here with me, constituents of mine from some of those rural communities.

Yet, you know, in the criticism from us, and I think broadly, at least some on the other side, is that under the previous administration, mismanagement and regulations have really slowed that expansion, leaving many Americans, particularly in undeserved and rural communities, without that necessary access.

In South Carolina's Seventh Congressional District, where I represent, Horry Telephone Cooperative, HTC, is bridging that digital divide. If you look at a map, basically you can tell where the county lines are because they have installed so much fiber and connected so many people, tens of thousands across the county and expanding

into others.

They have made major investments in high speed internet, but without these streamlined policies, their ability to provide that reliable, affordable broadband I think is at risk. And they are not the only ones, right.

We must fix those programs, preserve the Universal Service Fund, cut some of this red tape, and improve the grant programs, as discussed, like BEAD. And so I look forward to hearing how we can modernize that, and we have heard a lot of that testimony today.

But Mr. Hale, what role do you think the USF plays in ensuring broadband access generally to people along the Grand Strand or in rural communities in South Carolina?

Mr. Hale. Yes. I mean, as I stated before, USF is the essential program. It is not necessarily designed to bridge the digital divide completely with capital projects, but it does provide that in South Carolina. It does provide that in every State. And if you want it to last long-term and be there 10 years from now, be sustainable, and promote affordability, it is the program that you have to do.

Again, you have to have interjection of these other programs at the same time to do that capital for these market failure areas where USF is not providing that. You know, that is where BEAD comes in.

But it is critical. It is going to be critical for a long time. These networks aren't going to last forever. You are going to have to rebuild them again at some point, you know. So you have got to have a strong USF program.

Mr. Fry. Thank you for that.

Mr. Donovan, can you discuss the importance of ongoing USF support in maintaining initial investments in those broadband networks?

Mr. Donovan. Absolutely. And I will hold up FCC as a success story for how this

program can work. As I said before, there is no such thing as a future proof technology if you can't continue to preserve and invest and maintain it. That is just part of operating and network.

And that is why it is so critical to have the backs of USF, for preservation of service, as well as the expanding broadband connectivity. And that is why we are so concerned that if the Supreme Court does something to jeopardize USF, I strongly encourage you to be ready, for Congress to step in and to maintain it.

Mr. Fry. Speaking of -- I mean, that was honestly where I was going to go next. I was going to go to Mr. Hale, but we are going to continue right with you, sir. I think you just got in the hot seat in a good way.

You know, given that uncertainty, what should Congress do now to prep for maybe the inevitable or maybe just general things that we can do to fix it with the funding gaps, the loan defaults, broadband price hikes for consumers resulting from Supreme Court action?

Mr. Donovan. So CCA is part of this at the Supreme Court because we do think that what Congress did in the '96 Act is constitutional and that we were successful. But we are defending it because of the grave situation if this court goes the other way.

So Congress can affirm again the constitutionality of the Universal Service Fund. The challenge while the court case is pending is that if you don't know how the court could say that it is unconstitutional, it doesn't really give you the roadmap for what Congress needs to do to fix it, again, because we think that it is already pretty clear that it is constitutional.

Mr. Fry. Thank you for that.

Mr. Hale, also kind of in that same vein, do you believe that Congress should consider -- I know that there is a proposal to address the private delegation issue before

the court of the universal service administrative company. Do you believe that Congress should consider that option in preparation of?

Mr. Hale. Congress should be prepared, yes. I think there is a plan B. We still think USF is constitutional. We are hopeful that the Supreme Court will rule that way.

But yes, Congress should be prepared to step in because we have talked about today the devastating impact if USF went away, and it would be immediate. So definitely need to be ready for -- and I know this committee and staff and leadership have had discussions about that for a long time, along with the Senate Commerce Committee.

Mr. Fry. Just a few.

Thank you so much.

With that, I see my time has expired, Madam Chair, and I yield back -- Mr. Chair.

You switched.

Mr. Allen. [Presiding.] We had a switcheroo.

I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Fry. I wasn't assuming your gender.

Mr. Allen. Well, it is whatever you think you are these days, right. Anyway, enough of that.

The chair recognizes Mr. Tonko for 5 minutes for questioning.

Mr. Tonko. Thank you, Mr. Chair and Ranking Member Matsui, for hosting this hearing.

And thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Expanding broadband access has long been a priority of mine because high speed internet is no longer optional. It is essential. That is why the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's \$42 billion investment in the BEAD program is an historic victory for the American people in ensuring every American has access to affordable and high speed internet.

But instead of seizing this opportunity, House Republicans have sought to undermine it, sowing doubt, weakening program standards, and putting corporate interests ahead of hardworking Americans.

Despite these challenges, States are making headway. New York is one of 22 States that has completed the challenge process and is moving forward with provider selection and finalizing its BEAD proposals. That is real meaningful progress, but we can't afford to slow down.

Every day of delay means families and students and small businesses in underserved communities remain disconnected. Yet, instead of ensuring shovels hit the ground, Republicans and the Trump administration are trying to rewrite standards not to help our communities but to benefit billionaires, and this is unacceptable.

Let's be clear. Affordability is not negotiable. Broadband isn't truly accessible if people can't afford it.

So when the affordable connectivity program expired last Congress, over 3,000 of my constituents reached out, worried, frustrated and rightly demanding action, but Republicans refused to extend it.

So Ms. Morris, first, thank you for your outstanding work as the former deputy administrator at NTIA.

Given your experience at NTIA working on the BEAD program, how would weakening or removing affordability provisions impact broadband access for both rural and low income Americans?

Ms. Morris. Thank you, Congressman.

Well, I would just note that in the statute, affordability is a bedrock principle. It is mentioned three times in the first section alone, and there is a requirement in the statute that States adopt a low cost -- ensure that there is a low cost option available in

concert with NTIA and with approval from the assistant secretary, which all States have done.

The reason that it is so foundational in the statute is because when we are investing billions of dollars, as you note, into these networks, we want to ensure that they are actually reaching the households that need the connectivity most. If we are building networks that people on the ends cannot afford, we are building bridges to nowhere, networks to no one, and these households will not be able to -- and these communities will not be able to reap the full benefits of the connectivity.

Mr. Tonko. Well, thank you.

And as you indicate, making certain that we ensure funds reach the communities that need them the most, that requires strong Federal coordination. That is why in 2020, I fought to establish the Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth through my Access Broadband Act to improve coordination and ensure funding is deployed efficiently and equitably.

So Ms. Morris, given the complexity of BEAD's mission, how does coordination through OICG help ensure these funds reach the right communities?

Ms. Morris. Well, so within the department and within NTIA, ample coordination is happening, but I think the real success story of coordination is the coordination that this influx of funding has driven across the Federal Government at-large.

In my time at NTIA, I saw an impressive amount of day-to-day -- I mean, we were on the phone with other agencies, other departments day in, day out to make sure that our grant programs were coordinated in a way to maximize the Federal investment and take that money as far as it can.

And truly, the Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth was at the epicenter of that, and very incredible people working in that office doing great work day in and day

out.

Mr. Tonko. And another key pillar of the BEAD program is investing in a workforce that reflects the community it serves, ensuring good jobs, strong labor protections, and inclusive hiring practices. We cannot let these critical provisions be stripped away.

So how would removing these provisions impact equitable workforce development in broadband expansion?

Ms. Morris. I think the untold story with BEAD is that it is one of the best workforce development programs that we have seen, and these investments in infrastructure will drive a workforce to build them that is unprecedented in scale and scope.

The provisions in NTIA's NOFO for BEAD related to workforce were designed to ensure that the workforce building these networks was skilled, safe, and well compensated.

Mr. Tonko. Well, at the end of the day, this is about ensuring that all Americans, rural, urban, or suburban have the broadband access they need to thrive, and we cannot let political games or corporate greed derail this mission. The stakes are too high, and the time for action certainly is now.

And with that, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. Allen. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Seeing there are no further members wishing to be recognized, I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today. Thank you so much. This has been an important hearing, and I think we kind of understand how we have got to move forward.

I ask for unanimous consent to insert in the record the documents included on the staff hearing documents list.

And without objection, that will be the order.

[The information follows:]

\*\*\*\*\* COMMITTEE INSERT \*\*\*\*\*

Mr. Allen. And we are adjourned.

Sorry. Page two. Sorry. This is my first time doing this.

I remind members that they have 10 business days to submit questions for the record, and I ask the witnesses to respond to questions promptly.

Members should submit their questions by the close of business on Wednesday, March 19th.

Without objection, this subcommittee is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 5:33 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]