

Questions for the Record

Sarah Morris

Former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications & Information
and Former Deputy Administrator

National Telecommunications and Information Administration

U.S. Department of Commerce

House Committee on Energy & Commerce

Subcommittee on Communications & Technology

April 8, 2025

Chairman Hudson

Politico reports that former BEAD Director Evan Feinman, in his departure email, stated that BEAD requirements around climate resiliency, labor, and middle-class affordability "were inserted by the prior administration for messaging/political purposes."

1. Were these requirements added for messaging/political purposes?

No.

2. What kind of messaging/political purpose?

See above.

3. Were other requirements added for messaging/political purposes?

No.

4. Is it appropriate for the government to burden programs with requirements for messaging/political purposes?

No. In implementing a legislative directive, federal agencies should solicit the input of a variety of stakeholders, carefully consider the input from subject matter experts inside and outside of government, and utilize established review and approval processes before putting out guidance. NTIA followed each of these steps with BEAD.

The Honorable Doris Matsui

1. Delaware, Louisiana, and Nevada have finished awarding BEAD grants to providers and are ready for shovels in the ground.

However, the National Institute for Standards and Technology, the grants administrator for NTIA, has not issued approval yet. This has grounded these three states' progress to a halt, delaying critical broadband projects.

Last week, NIST began slashing its workforce, and we know DOGE isn't done taking a sledgehammer to our federal agencies and dismantling critical public services.

Ms. Morris, how would workforce cuts to agencies such as NIST and the Department of Commerce impact our ability to connect Americans to affordable broadband without delay?

Workforce cuts to these agencies would dramatically delay BEAD funding getting out the door and shovels in the ground. Both NTIA and NIST play critical roles in reviewing the materials required by law and administering funds for all 56 states and territories.

The Honorable Greg Landsman

1. Ms. Morris, plenty of people have spent time complaining about BEAD and its pace. The fact is, the last administration left BEAD and other broadband access programs in a great place and it is this administration that seems poised to halt all that momentum and destroy the program. Can you talk about the status of BEAD on January 19th and why it is particularly disappointing that, rather than capitalize on these successes and doing a victory lap, the current administration seems ready to turn this program into a failure?

Under the prior administration, BEAD moved at breakneck speed to meet Congress's timeline. Under this administration, BEAD has slowed to a standstill. Frustratingly for all stakeholders, there is no clarity on how or when this standstill will be resolved - every day this administration fails to act is another day that the communities across the country remain unconnected.

2. Ms. Morris, it is clear that some people want to use BEAD and network deployment to carry out a larger agenda of regulatory rollback. It is important that we find a balance that supports broadband access. Can the current administration take a less disruptive approach to expand on the flexibility the Biden NTIA provided as situations arise?

States know best how to connect the unconnected in their state, and the current administration should continue to support a state-driven approach to BEAD implementation. Any additional

guidance should be voluntary and should not require states to redo any steps in the process. The current administration could focus on other efforts such as permitting reform, workforce development, and more appropriate tax treatment for BEAD funds, which would actually support broadband deployment and allow states to move forward rapidly.