

**Opening Statement for Chairman Richard Hudson
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“The Telecommunications Act of 1996: 30 Years Later”**

March 26, 2026

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Good morning, and welcome to today’s hearing examining the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

It’s hard to believe that 1996 was 30 years ago. That February, I was a student at UNC Charlotte. I won’t ask my colleagues where they were at that time – or staff if they were even born yet. Here in Washington, right across the street at the Library of Congress, members of Congress celebrated the passage of the Telecommunications Act. I have to admit, this event was not on my radar as a senior in college.

However, the Telecom Act was a huge milestone when it was enacted. It was the first major rewrite of communications policy since the Communications Act of 1934. The law was designed to deregulate the market, unleash competition, and

open opportunities for new technologies and services. In many ways, it succeeded. By eliminating certain monopoly-era laws and preempting state and local barriers, the Telecom Act opened the communications ecosystem to new players, leading to competition and innovation that ultimately benefited consumers. Competitors could enter local phone markets, telephone companies could now provide video, cable companies could provide voice service, and they could do this while entering markets they previously could not serve. It also enshrined the principles of universal service that are so important to rural America. Finally, it included what we now know as Section 230—26 words that created the internet economy we know today.

But the world has changed significantly since 1996. Back then, the Internet was a new technology. We were just beginning to hear the familiar, but now extinct, dial-up tone and use web

browsers like Netscape. None of us could have predicted the technological revolution that was coming.

The Telecom Act unfortunately did not foresee how essential broadband would be to our lives. Nor did it see the rise of new ways to communicate. Back then, everyone relied on their home landline to make calls. Cell phones were considered a luxury. But today, we all have a computer in our pocket that among other things is a very quality cell phone. I'm not sure if any of us even still have a home phone...if we do, I wonder how many can even remember their number. And if we wanted to talk with someone on the other side of the world in 1996, we had to rely on a long-distance carrier to place an expensive, charge-by-the-minute call, whereas today, we can connect with anyone, anywhere via a cell phone call, a video call, a text message, or through social media.

The world of 1996 looks nothing like the world of today, and it's time we update our laws to reflect that. That's why we are holding this hearing. Today's hearing is an opportunity to look back at the Telecom Act—as well as the law it amended, the Communications Act of 1934—and find out what continues to work and what does not.

For example, does it still make sense to regulate communications technologies in different silos? Do we still need an entire section on payphone service? Is it time to revisit Section 230? And how should we address media ownership as broadcasters must now compete for engagement and revenue against platforms that did not exist in 1996? Congress needs to consider how we should modernize our communications policy framework to reflect the technologies of today in way that will also work for the technologies of tomorrow.

We have an esteemed panel of witnesses here today—some of whom were intimately involved with drafting the Telecom Act. I look forward to hearing from them, and I look forward to this discussion.