

Chairman Walden—Opening Statement
“Do Not Call: Combating Robocalls and Caller ID Spoofing” Subcommittee
on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection

As Prepared for Delivery

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Good morning and thank you to our witnesses for being here today. Robocalls and caller ID spoofing have exploded in recent years, with over 3 billion calls placed last month alone. We all get them. Whether they’re interrupting a family sitting down to dinner in Bend, Oregon, or ringing during a meeting in Washington, DC, everyone experiences the pervasive and invasive effects.

At best, these calls are annoying. At worst, they have the potential to scam and defraud consumers, especially senior citizens. According to the Department of Justice, scams targeting the elderly are increasing dramatically, and fraudsters steal an estimated 3 billion dollars from American seniors each year. It is now more important than ever to educate consumers on how detect and avoid fraud stemming from robocalls.

The Federal Trade Commission and Federal Communications Commission, as well as our own Committee, have taken steps to protect consumers from robocalls and spoofing. Both the FTC and FCC operate consumer complaint websites and hotlines where consumers can report illegal telemarketing calls. Reporting can help the agencies crack down on illegal callers and improve the data they share with industry players and telecommunications companies, who then develop solutions. The FTC also manages the National Do Not Call Registry, where anyone can register their home or mobile phone for free.

Here at the Committee, we recently passed the RAY BAUM’S Act, which includes provisions directing the FCC to expand and clarify the prohibition on misleading or spoofed caller ID information. It also requires that they, in consultation with the FTC, create consumer education materials on how to avoid this type of spoofing. These provisions were signed into law by the president in March.

This is just one of many steps in the right direction, but as communication technology continues to advance, so do the tools and tactics illegal telemarketers use to evade existing protections. So-called “neighbor spoofing” is one of the most effective new tactics, and it is particularly hard to detect. Scammers use phone numbers with your area code or an area code nearby to engender trust. Many

consumers are likely to answer when it looks like the call could be coming from their child's school, their local church, or their dentist's office. What do we need to do to stop these bad actors? I for one am sick and tired of these calls.

We also finished up another tax season last week. IRS schemes are on the rise as scammers deceive individuals into giving up their personal or financial information. Using the internet and social media, fraudsters can convincingly portray IRS employees by naming a few identifying facts, like your home address or current city of residence. To avoid falling prey to these calls and others, never give personally identifiable information over the phone. Government officials will never ask for your bank account information or social security number over the phone. Consumers should hang up and call their local IRS office to check if the call they received was legitimate.

The bad actors clearly keep evolving, and we need to make sure consumers stay one step ahead. There are a wide array of technical and marketplace solutions consumers can use to block, avoid, or otherwise protect themselves from robocalls and caller ID spoofing. There are now over 500 call blocking apps for Android, Apple, and other devices. Many home phone providers offer the option to add robocall blocking functions to their service for free. Today, we'll hear from a few of the innovators in robocall blocking and advanced caller ID technology on how to implement these strategies for both landline and mobile phones.

There is no singular solution to solve the problem of unwanted calls, but we owe it to our constituents to present all the options available. Improving education and awareness will be key to preventing consumer harm. I want to thank our witnesses again for being here today, and I look forward to this important discussion.