

**The Honorable Mike Quigley
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government**

**Hearing on “The Need for Universal Broadband: Lessons from the
COVID-19 Pandemic”**

Opening Statement

As Prepared for Delivery

10:30AM Eastern / 9:30 AM Central | May 18, 2021

[Host will complete pre-hearing script, and yield to Chair to countdown from 10 to begin the livestream.]

10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

This hearing will come to order.

As this hearing is fully virtual, we must address a few housekeeping matters.

For today’s meeting the Chair or staff designated by the Chair may mute participants' microphones when they are not under recognition for the purposes of eliminating inadvertent background noise.

Members are responsible for muting and unmuting themselves. If I notice that you have not unmuted yourself, I will ask you if you would like the staff to unmute you. If you indicate approval by nodding, the staff will unmute your microphone.

I remind all Members and Witnesses that the five-minute clock still applies. If there is a technology issue, we will move to the next Member until the issue is resolved and you will retain the balance of your time.

You will notice a clock on your screen that will show how much time is remaining. At 1-minute remaining, the clock will turn to yellow. At 30 seconds remaining, I will gently tap the gavel to remind Members that their time is almost expired. When your time has expired, the clock will turn red and I will begin to recognize the next Member.

In terms of the speaking order, we will follow the order set forth in the House Rules, beginning with the Chair and Ranking Member, then Members present at the time the hearing is called to order will be recognized in order of seniority, and finally Members not present at the time the hearing is called to order.

Finally, House Rules require me to remind you that we have set up an e-mail address to which Members can send items they wish to submit in writing at any of our hearings or markups. That e-mail address has been provided in advance to your staff.

This morning we welcome four individuals with expertise in broadband:

- Matt Dunne of the Center on Rural Innovation,
- Max Stier of the Partnership for Public Service,
- Joi Chaney from the National Urban League,
- and Lang Zimmerman of Yelcot Communications.

They are here today to discuss one of the most important issues of our times: ensuring that all Americans have the connectivity to fully participate in our economy and society.

Broadband has been an enormous benefit to our country. It's a key driver of economic growth and innovation, has democratized access to

educational resources and new job opportunities, and has broadened availability of health care and social services.

But during the COVID-19 pandemic, broadband become much more than that. It became a matter, literally, of life and death.

People with reliable broadband at home were more easily able to socially distance by transitioning to telecommuting and remote learning. They could use video conferencing to keep in touch with friends and family, access health care services, order essential supplies and medicines, and use government services.

In other words, the pandemic has made it abundantly clear that access to reliable broadband is not a luxury but a necessity. Broadband is as important to modern life as electricity or running water.

Unfortunately, not everyone was so fortunate. Many of our rural communities have no connectivity or remain reliant on outdated technologies that don't provide sufficient bandwidth.

Communities of color have also been disproportionately affected. It has limited access to jobs, left many students of color struggling to keep up with their schoolwork, and put many people of color at higher risk of catching the coronavirus.

As the subcommittee that oversees the Federal Communications Commission, we have been working on these issues for years, and we ramped up our efforts during the pandemic.

We helped secure billions in funding to provide devices and connectivity for at-home learning and telemedicine. We've provided substantial resources for better broadband maps and given states the flexibility to use coronavirus relief funds on broadband.

And we are excited that just last week, the FCC launched the Emergency Broadband Benefit, a \$3.2 billion program to provide discounted broadband services and devices to low-income Americans, including people affected by the pandemic.

Those efforts are just the beginning, however. There is bipartisan agreement about the importance of ensuring universal broadband access, and the Biden Administration has made it clear that broadband is one of their main priorities in an infrastructure package.

Today, we will learn more about how the lack of broadband affects rural communities, the connectivity issues facing communities of color, and the challenges of small internet providers. And we will hear about an issue dear to me and my fellow appropriators—how broadband might make the Federal government more efficient and effective.

These insights will help ensure that we fully incorporate lessons from the pandemic into our infrastructure discussions and ensure we get the most value for each dollar we invest.

I look forward to the discussion.

Before I turn to each of the witnesses for their statements, I would like to recognize our Ranking Member, Mr. Womack, for his opening remarks.

[Womack Statement]

Thank you, Mr. Womack.

Thank you. Now we will turn to our witnesses. Without objection, your full written testimonies will be entered into the record. With that in mind, we would ask for you to please summarize your opening statements in 5 minutes. Our first witness is Matt Dunne, Founder and Executive Director of the Center on Rural Innovation

[Dunne Statement]

Our next witness is Max Stier, President and CEO of the Partnership for Public Service.

[Stier Statement]

Now we will hear from Joi Chaney, Executive Director of the Washington Bureau and Senior Vice President for Policy and Advocacy at the National Urban League.

[Chaney Statement]

Our fourth witness is Lang Zimmerman, Vice President of Yelcot Communications.

[Zimmerman Statement]

Thank you. We'll now begin with questions.