

**Opening Statement of Honorable Marsha Blackburn
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on “Broadband: Deploying America’s 21st Century
Infrastructure”
March 21, 2017**

(As prepared for delivery)

Welcome everyone to the Communications and Technology Subcommittee’s hearing titled: “***Broadband: Deploying America’s 21st Century Infrastructure***”. Also, thank you to the witnesses for appearing as we examine barriers to deployment and consider discussion drafts to facilitate the deployment of communications infrastructure. Broadband is the infrastructure challenge of this decade and the “digital divide” continues to frustrate many Americans. We must cut through red tape by streamlining permitting processes and implement accurate availability data in order to solve the broadband dilemma.

Lack of broadband access, particularly in rural areas, is an issue which affects the constituents of numerous Members of this subcommittee, Republican and Democrat. We are all tired of hearing stories about parents driving their children to the local McDonald’s for Internet access in order to finish homework assignments. We owe them better, period. The 5G revolution is upon us and we should modernize our laws to address issues such as tower siting and federal rights of ways, which are tying the hands of our private sector.

Let’s consider the “small cell” phenomenon. Many carriers are now deploying small cells the size of pizza boxes, as opposed to building large towers. Small cells can be easily attached to freestanding poles, mitigate the risk of adverse environmental impacts, and are less likely to upset local zoning ordinances. They simply do not require the depth of review contemplated by outdated laws designed for larger towers.

Each Administration has attempted to spur broadband deployment beginning with the Clinton Administration’s efforts in 1995 when GSA tried to streamline the permitting process for wireless antennas. \$7.2 billion in Federal grants and loans were awarded through NTIA’s Broadband Technology Opportunity Program and the RUS Broadband Initiative Program as a part of the Obama Administration’s American

Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. President Trump has signaled that broadband will be a significant part of his Administration's planned infrastructure package.

Therefore, we will be considering two discussion drafts that expedite broadband deployment. The first will assist these efforts by doing things such as: 1) creating an inventory of federal assets that can be used to attach or install broadband infrastructure; 2) requiring all landholding agencies to use common templates when leasing space for wireless broadband attachments; and 3) streamlining processes for communications facilities location applications at the Department of Interior and Forest Service. The second, Representative Eshoo's "Dig Once" initiative, would mandate the inclusion of broadband conduit during the construction of certain highway projects which receive federal funding.

In addition to reducing barriers to deployment, we must accurately collect and aggregate data to update the National Broadband Map. The map has not been updated since June 2014 when BTOP funding ceased. It is imperative that we fix the map, but doing so is a fool's errand without precise data. This will ensure that private and federal investments are targeted at unserved areas.

Unleashing broadband will create economic, educational and healthcare opportunities for millions of hardworking taxpayers. A recent Accenture report notes that smart cities growth could result in a \$500 billion impact on GDP over ten years. People want broadband as much as new roads. Republicans and Democrats are eager to work together to solve this challenge.