

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on “Broadband: Deploying America’s 21st Century
Infrastructure”
March 21, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

High speed Internet access has made communications and commerce easier than ever before and the importance of broadband in America’s economy cannot be understated. In order to guarantee that all Americans – including folks living in rural areas like my district in eastern Oregon – have access to the tools they need to succeed in the 21st century economy, our policies must reflect our commitment to deploying the physical infrastructure of broadband.

Last Congress, this subcommittee took a thoughtful approach to identify barriers to broadband infrastructure deployment and examined proposals that would eliminate them. I know Chairman Blackburn’s leadership on this issue will lead to a comprehensive approach that will help bring broadband to the unserved parts of our country.

As Chairman Blackburn has said, broadband is the infrastructure of the 21st century. I stand ready to work with my colleagues to ensure that broadband is included in any infrastructure package that moves through Congress. But as we look to expanding our national investment in broadband we cannot do so without reliable data. Unfortunately, too often our data is insufficient and investments are not targeted where they can do the most good. Until we know where broadband is and where it is not, we will continue to make the same mistakes that have slowed rural buildout for years. This subcommittee spent a lot of time in the 112th and 113th Congresses living with the consequences of bad data as we investigated the Broadband Stimulus programs. And the Universal Service Program has long suffered from a lack of good data. This has led to inefficient investment and more than a decade of work by the agency and USAC to stamp out bad actors and to recover from bad investments. We must not repeat the mistakes of the past or double down on inefficiencies.

I commend Chairman Blackburn for expanding on our work from last Congress with a focus on improving mapping data. We must ensure that every dollar – whether from private investment or directed through our federal programs – is invested where it is needed most. I’m also glad to see Ms. Eshoo’s “Dig Once” bill has made a return this Congress. I think that this is smart policy and will help spur broadband deployment across the country.

Without access to a high-speed Internet connection our businesses and constituents are inherently at a disadvantage in the 21st century. We must work to connect these underserved areas of the country and our work to achieve that objective continues today.