



COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & COMMERCE
DEMOCRATS
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Pallone Remarks at FCC Oversight Hearing

Washington, D.C. – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Subcommittee on Communications and Technology hearing on “Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission.”*

The Federal Communications Commission is an independent agency created by and accountable to Congress. Congress gave the agency broad powers and a responsibility to protect consumers, advance competition, promote universal service at reasonable rates, and enhance public safety. In other words, to work in the public interest. As the FCC’s oversight committee, it is our duty to ensure the Commission’s actions advance those goals and hold the Chairman and Commissioners accountable when the agency does not.

Unfortunately, the Republican majority of this committee has been unwilling to follow through on its promise to hold quarterly oversight hearings with the FCC. This is the first oversight hearing in nine months, and only the third this Congress. That is an embarrassment.

During that time, the Commission has repeatedly acted contrary to its core mission. In a series of partisan votes, the agency dismantled protections for consumers and initiated numerous proceedings designed to benefit big corporations to the detriment of working-class Americans and local communities.

By far the most high profile and controversial decision was the elimination of the FCC’s net neutrality rules. Those safeguards protected consumers, protected small businesses, and protected free speech. Chairman Pai ignored the vast majority of the 24 million comments from individuals and businesses supporting net neutrality.

It’s not surprising that Chairman Pai’s order faces massive consumer opposition. Public outrage from start-up companies, working families, educators, health care professionals, veterans, and so many others at townhalls and community centers have driven Congressional action. In May, the Republican-controlled Senate passed legislation that would reinstate net neutrality. Ranking Member Doyle is now championing that legislation here in the House. It is not too late to stand with the American people and restore net neutrality. I urge Speaker Ryan

to bring this legislation up for a vote and stand with the bipartisan Members that have signed a petition to force one.

Sadly, the FCC's disregard for consumers does not end there. At a time when other agencies are separating children from their families at our borders and violence at schools is far too commonplace, the Trump FCC wants to roll back rules that limit advertising to children and require stations to air educational programming for kids. This does not make sense. If the agency was serious about focusing on consumers, it would want to help parents searching for quality educational programming and shield children, not make them easier targets for big business.

In another example of siding with corporations over consumers, Chairman Pai's changes to the FCC's media ownership protections undermine competition, localism, and diverse viewpoints in favor of corporate consolidation.

While the Commission rightfully acknowledged that Sinclair's proposed merger and related divestitures may violate the law, the rollback of the media ownership rules opens the door for the next Sinclair.

Universal service—critical to the most vulnerable populations—also has been undermined under Chairman Pai's leadership. The FCC's proposal to revise the Lifeline program is a particularly egregious example. If adopted, this proposal could cut phone or internet service for approximately 8.3 million people. These are single mothers struggling to get by, veterans searching for jobs, and seniors on fixed-incomes. They are at risk of being left behind. The FCC should be looking for ways to help those struggling participate in our economy and community – not cut them off.

Finally, while the Commission has worked to update the emergency alert system, advance next generation 9-1-1, and implement the SANDy Act, it has fallen short in making cybersecurity a priority. The agency has retreated from the efforts of previous Administrations at a time when cyber criminals – foreign and domestic – are becoming more aggressive.

Today's communications networks connect businesses, consumers, and government agencies. These networks drive the modern economy. But those same networks provide a target for cyber-attacks by criminal gangs and nation states. As the agency charged with promoting public safety, the FCC should work with and encourage companies to develop best practices, address vulnerabilities, and prepare for cybersecurity attacks.

Since the FCC is shirking its responsibilities, Congress should be conducting more oversight in the future.

I thank the Chairman and Commissioners for appearing before us today and look forward to your testimony, and I yield back.

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