

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“RAY BAUM’S Act: A Bipartisan Foundation for Bridging the Digital
Divide”
December 11, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning and welcome to our witnesses, thank you for being here. It is a fitting tribute for the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology to end the 115th Congress with a hearing dedicated to RAY BAUM’S Act. As many of you know, Ray spent his life working to maintain a bipartisan spirit in facing the communications challenges we all seek to address. This subcommittee’s achievement stands as a reminder of the potential to work together and get a substantial telecommunications law across the goal line, even in the face of gridlock and partisan divide. And I have every hope that this bipartisan spirit will continue into the next Congress.

Even before RAY BAUM’S Act became a reality, this subcommittee worked on two important bills that were signed into law. Kari’s Law assured that if you called 9-1-1, you knew that call would go through no matter where you are, and an important complement to that, the Improving Rural Call Quality and Reliability Act, designed to ensure that rural calls don’t fall through the cracks. These two measures represented significant accomplishments for public safety but also for rural areas, and showed that we could get things done, even for bills like these that we tried to pass before in a previous Congress. And I think they also whetted the subcommittee’s appetite for bigger accomplishments, setting the stage for the major milestone of RAY BAUM’S Act.

Our work certainly demonstrates the value of working in a bipartisan manner, specifically on public safety legislation. Together, we helped to ensure that broadcasters won't get knocked off the air in times of emergencies. The spoofing provision that was included will help us in moving forward on the bipartisan SWATting legislation we teed up a few weeks ago. And, of course, the Ranking Member's SANDy Act will help to avail emergency responders of all technologies during natural disasters.

Under RAY BAUM'S Act, the broadcast stations that did not participate in the incentive auction and were assigned to new channels have an additional \$1 billion dollars for reimbursement of expenses to make that move. When it became apparent that the original \$1.75 billion that was allocated for these reimbursements wasn't going to be enough, we worked in a bipartisan way to ensure that we kept our word and that these broadcasters will remain on air.

Also important was the inclusion of low-power TV and translators, which now have funds available for reimbursement. These stations bring the benefits of broadcasting to rural and hard-to-reach places in my district and countless others. I'm looking forward to hearing testimony from the witnesses on how the repack effort is going, given the new funds and the additional classes of entities who now qualify to have their moving expenses reimbursed.

While I think we can all agree that RAY BAUM'S Act provides a solid foundation of bipartisan accomplishments that we can build on in the next Congress, we must also remember to remain vigilant to challenges to the jurisdiction of the committee.

This subcommittee has shown its ability to come together when the jurisdiction of this committee is at stake; whether it be threats to our communications networks or consequences of safe harbors that now shape the Internet differently than they did in its infancy.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to continue the dialogue on those issues next year.

There is still work to be done, and there are still obstacles that remain. But I am optimistic that we can work together next year, in good faith, to continue addressing areas of common ground.

Lastly, my colleagues and I would like to thank Subcommittee Chairman Marsha Blackburn and Vice Chairman Leonard Lance as today is our last hearing with them at the helm. I want to extend my sincerest congratulations to Rep. Blackburn, who will represent the people of Tennessee in the United States Senate. And I want Mr. Lance to know how much I valued his thoughtful, effective and civil public service. Thanks to you both for your dedication and hard work.

With that, Madam Chairman, I yield back.