

**Opening Statement of Congressman Bill Johnson**  
**Subcommittee on Communications and Technology**  
**“Connecting America: Broadband Solutions to Pandemic Problems”**  
**February 17, 2020**

*As Prepared for Delivery*

Good morning. Chairman Doyle and Chairman Pallone, I want to thank you for holding this important hearing to look at the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our country’s broadband networks.

It is time that this committee holds a hearing to examine ways to close the digital divide and the homework gap, which House Energy and Commerce Committee Republicans urged you to hold last year, and...

...though it took nearly a year, I am glad we are finally turning our attention to this matter. These are two crucial issues facing Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. *[Mr. Chairman, I request unanimous consent to enter this letter into the record.]*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, our broadband networks have held our economy, our education system, and our communities together where access has been available. Despite the challenges many American industries have faced, our nation’s broadband providers stepped up when it mattered most.

And they were able to do this because our country’s policies allowed them to do so.

The past four years of Republican-led, market-oriented policies created a competitive environment that facilitates innovation and investment in our networks, leading to increased speeds, extra capacity, lower prices and flexibility to adapt when faced with the unexpected.

I can think of no greater test than the early challenges of the pandemic. More than 40 percent of America's workforce began working and learning from home overnight.

Children began streaming classes and their favorite TV shows around the clock, parents were juggling video calls with video weddings and reunions, and even Congress began legislating over WebEx.

All of the capacity that had been dedicated to office parks now suddenly needed to be made available at homes on short notice. And in a stunning show of American ingenuity, our providers kept the Internet up and running at full speed while others in Europe failed.

I commend all of the providers who continue to work around the clock to ensure Americans have the connectivity they need. Our country's policies foster a competitive communications marketplace – and this competition only benefits consumers.

Now, we're not there yet, in most rural areas of America. While bipartisan policies led by Republicans have enabled the ISP's to do much good work with existing broadband infrastructure, there are many places throughout our country that do not have even the basic access to the digital economy. And, we MUST continue to solve that problem.

Thankfully, we do not have socialized broadband in this country – yet. In fact, as long as we continue to push bipartisan policies we will continue to move in the opposite direction from a socialized solution.

Last summer, Committee Republicans worked with our Republican colleagues in the Senate to outline a framework that would help connect all Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We then worked with many of our colleagues here today to find bipartisan agreement to enact many of them into law, including:

- Establishing a \$1.3 billion broadband grant program to connect unserved rural Americans and tribes;
- Increasing broadband access and digital opportunities in minority communities and for low-income Americans;
- Increasing funding for telehealth programs; and
- Providing funding for broadband maps and to secure our networks.

Though not in this committee's jurisdiction, Congress also funded a cumulative \$110 BILLION to the Department of Education to invest in "hardware, software, and connectivity" needed to safely reopen schools and continue remote learning.

Mr. Chairman, it is our duty to now make sure that money gets to where it belongs: to Americans.

Let's not abandon the American people when it matters most. We must make sure that money ALREADY appropriated gets to our children for distance learning. Without that, our efforts are in vain.

But there is more that can be done. With billions of dollars dedicated to connecting unserved Americans, we must now move swiftly to turbocharge that investment by removing barriers to deployment.

We can start by working together to pass the Boosting Broadband Connectivity Agenda that committee Republicans unveiled this week.

This agenda sets out an ambitious slate of proposals designed to roll back regulatory red tape to put Americans back to work building next-generation networks and maintain U.S. broadband leadership.

We have proven that when we work together, we can help Americans in need.

I hope my colleagues across the aisle will join us in this effort to encourage speedy, affordable broadband deployment so all Americans can be connected.

Thank you all for being here today, and thank you again Chairman Doyle for holding this hearing. Better late than never.