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6 BROADBAND EQUITY:

7 ADDRESSING DISPARITIES IN ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

8 THURSDAY, MAY 6, 2021

9 House of Representatives,

10 Subcommittee on Communications and Technology,

11 Committee on Energy and Commerce,

12 Washington, D.C.

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16 The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:30 a.m.
17 via Webex, Hon. Michael F. Doyle, [chairman of the
18 subcommittee] presiding.

19 Present: Representatives Doyle, McNerney, Clarke,
20 McEachin, Soto, O'Halleran, Rice, Eshoo, Butterfield, Matsui,
21 Welch, Schrader, Cardenas, Kelly, Craig, Fletcher, Pallone
22 (ex officio); Latta, Guthrie, Bilirakis, Johnson, Long,
23 Hudson, Mullin, Walberg, Carter, Duncan, Curtis, and Rodgers
24 (ex officio).

25 Also present: Representatives Dingell, Blunt Rochester,
26 Schrier; and Pence.

27 Staff Present: AJ Brown, Counsel; Jeff Carroll, Staff

28 Director; Parul Desai, FCC Detailee; Jennifer Epperson,
29 Counsel; Waverly Gordon, General Counsel; Tiffany Guarascio,
30 Deputy Staff Director; Perry Hamilton, Deputy Chief Clerk;
31 Alex Hoehn-Saric, Chief Counsel, Communications and Consumer
32 Protection; Jerry Leverich, Senior Counsel; Dan Miller,
33 Professional Staff Miller; Phil Murphy, Policy Coordinator;
34 Joe Orlando, Policy Analyst; Kaitlyn Peel, Digital Director;
35 Tim Robinson, Chief Counsel; Chloe Rodriguez, Deputy Chief
36 Clerk; Kate Arey, Minority Content Manager and Digital
37 Assistant; David Brodian, Minority Detailee, C&T; Sarah
38 Burke, Minority Deputy Staff Director; Michael Cameron,
39 Minority Policy Analyst, CPC, Energy, Environment; William
40 Clutterbuck, Minority Staff Assistant; Theresa Gambo,
41 Minority Financial and Office Administrator; Jack Heretik,
42 Minority Press Secretary; Nate Hodson, Minority Staff
43 Director; Sean Kelly, Minority Press Secretary; Peter Kielty,
44 Minority General Counsel; Emily King, Minority Member
45 Services Director; Bijan Koochmaraie, Minority Chief Counsel;
46 Tim Kurth, Minority Chief Counsel, CPC; Kate O'Connor,
47 Minority Chief Counsel, C&T; Clare Paoletta, Minority Policy
48 Analyst, Health; Arielle Roth, Minority Detailee, C&T; Olivia
49 Shields, Minority Communications Director; Peter Spencer,
50 Minority Senior Professional Staff Member, Energy; Michael
51 Taggart, Minority Policy Director; Evan Viau, Minority
52 Professional Staff Member, C&T; Everett Winnick, Minority

53 Director of Information Technology.

54

55 *Mr. Doyle. The committee will now come to order.
56 Today the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology is
57 holding a hearing entitled, "Broadband Equity: Addressing
58 Disparities in Access and Affordability."

59 Due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, today's
60 hearing is being held remotely. All members and witnesses
61 will be participating via video conferencing.

62 As part of our hearing, microphones will be set on mute
63 for the purpose of eliminating inadvertent background noise.
64 Members and witnesses, you will need to unmute your
65 microphones each time you wish to speak.

66 Documents for the record can be sent to Joe Orlando at
67 the email address we have provided to staff. All documents
68 will be entered into the record at the conclusion of the
69 hearing.

70 The chair now recognizes himself for five minutes for an
71 opening statement.

72 First off, I would like to thank our witnesses for
73 testifying before the subcommittee today.

74 Equity and broadband access, affordability, and adoption
75 is more important than ever. As Congress works on President
76 Biden's American Jobs Plan, it is critical that we consider
77 solutions to our nation's infrastructure challenges that not
78 only close the digital divide, but address historic
79 inequities that have, for far too long, left behind Black,

80 Hispanic, tribal, and low-income communities. Studies by Pew
81 Research show that communities of color lag predominantly
82 White communities when it comes to the adoption of broadband.
83 Older Americans and Americans in rural communities lag
84 younger and urban communities, respectively, in broadband
85 adoption, as well.

86 Due to this committee's good work, we were able to come
87 together and establish the Emergency Broadband Benefit
88 Program, which provides a monthly benefit to qualifying
89 households for Internet service. We were also able to pass
90 the Emergency Connectivity Fund, which will help students get
91 connected through the E-Rate program, as part of the American
92 Recovery Plan.

93 The EBB program will become available to consumers on
94 May 12th. It will provide a \$50 monthly benefit to
95 qualifying households for emergency broadband connectivity
96 during the pandemic. The FCC has set up a portal to help
97 folks navigate this program and get emergency broadband at
98 [getemergencybroadband.org](https://www.fcc.gov/emergencybroadband). I am pleased to see that so many
99 broadband providers have applied to participate. It is
100 critical that more join this program, so that as many folks
101 as possible can take advantage of this benefit.

102 I have also been pleased to see that a number of ISPs
103 expanded access to low-income adoption programs during this
104 critical time. It is my hope that, as the committee

105 continues to work on closing the digital divide, that we can
106 create a permanent program to provide broadband connectivity
107 to people in need. These services are not luxuries. They
108 are necessities that everyone needs in order to participate
109 in society.

110 We also need to look beyond programs that increase
111 adoption among folks that qualify for means-tested programs.
112 Far too many Americans lack access to affordable rates.
113 Studies have shown that adoption could significantly increase
114 if all consumers had access to more affordable service plans.
115 Proposals like Congresswoman Eshoo's to expand the
116 availability of municipal networks, or proposals to place
117 open access requirements on networks built with federal funds
118 could spur competition and reduce prices for consumers.

119 I have always believed in the power of competition, and
120 study after study has shown that consumers pay more in
121 markets that are served by monopolies or duopolies. This is
122 particularly true in communities that have been left behind
123 due to redlining.

124 As we are working to fix the rural and urban divide, we
125 must also address the substandard service and, at times, the
126 lack of service in communities of color.

127 Finally, we need to address programs that expand digital
128 equity programs that provide outreach and digital literacy
129 and training skills. The opportunities and resources

130 provided by this technology are wasted if you don't know how
131 to use them. Too many Americans still lack the essential
132 skills, and are missing out and, all too often, being left
133 out of our increasingly digitized society. It is important
134 that we put in place programs to address these skills gaps,
135 but also do the important outreach necessary to engage these
136 communities and help them get online.

137 That is why I have been proud to work with our chairman,
138 Frank Pallone, and Majority Whip Clyburn on the Accessible,
139 Affordable Internet for All Act, and President Biden and Vice
140 President Harris on the American Jobs Plan. These proposals
141 represent the once-in-a-generation investment we need to
142 address these deep-seated digital inequities in our society.

143 Thank you, I look forward to the testimony of our
144 witnesses.

145 [The prepared statement of Mr. Doyle follows:]

146

147 *****COMMITTEE INSERT*****

148

149 *Mr. Doyle. And I yield the remainder of my time to my
150 good friend from the great State of California, Ms. Eshoo.

151 *Ms. Eshoo. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this
152 highly-important hearing.

153 I think the digital divide is a national embarrassment,
154 and we have to solve it. Community broadband is an important
155 part of the solution, because it is already working across
156 the country. Over 900 municipalities, tribes, co-ops, and
157 public-private partnerships operate community networks that
158 are -- that successfully connect millions of Americans, and
159 they can afford it.

160 But unfortunately, 22 states have passed laws that limit
161 these networks. My bicameral legislation, the Community
162 Broadband Act, preempts these protections -- these
163 protectionist laws to enable community networks in all
164 states.

165 And I am really pleased that President Biden has
166 included community broadband in his infrastructure proposal,
167 and I thank you and Chairman Pallone for including my bill in
168 the Lift Act -- the Lift America Act. So thank you for
169 yielding time to me, and I look forward to a productive
170 hearing today, and I yield back.

171

172

173

174 [The prepared statement of Ms. Eshoo follows:]

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176 *****COMMITTEE INSERT*****

177

178 *Mr. Doyle. I thank the gentlelady. The chair will now
179 recognize my good friend from the great state of Ohio, the
180 ranking member for the subcommittee, Mr. Latta, for five
181 minutes.

182 *Mr. Latta. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman,
183 good seeing you again today, and thank you to our witnesses
184 for testifying today.

185 Last week President Biden addressed the nation and
186 outlined a slate of new ideas and programs that, if enacted,
187 will radically redefine the role of government in our daily
188 lives. While many of the goals he outlined are important, it
189 would be a mistake for the government to fundamentally
190 reshape entire industries before understanding what the data
191 and research says is needed.

192 Let me be clear: we must continue to support policies
193 that will help all Americans get connected.

194 When it comes to broadband affordability, never have
195 consumers gotten more for less. Internet prices have
196 drastically dropped, and speeds and competition have
197 increased. According to the most recent Communications
198 Marketplace Report published by the FCC, the cost of the most
199 popular plans have decreased by 20 percent, while speeds
200 increased by 16 percent since 2015. And as a result of more
201 Americans upgrading their services, the average cost of the
202 highest-speed offerings have dropped by 37 percent, while

203 simultaneously increasing speeds by 27 percent.

204 Broadband subscriptions in urban areas have increased by
205 21.8 percent over the past 5 years, and, despite the claims
206 of consolidation, the number of broadband providers has
207 increased over 25 percent from 2014 to 2019, with urban core
208 areas seeing an increase of 30 percent. This advancement is
209 the result of FCC policies that streamlined government
210 regulations that have promoted competition and private-sector
211 investment, and low-income programs and network upgrades.
212 This did not happen because of government intervention and
213 burdensome mandates like those that are being suggested by
214 the Biden-Harris Administration. Yet, despite these
215 improvements in broadband offerings, some Americans still
216 choose not to adopt broadband.

217 Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to submit the
218 study of the Technology Policy Institute for the record.

219 The COVID-19 pandemic shook our country in a way -- and
220 our way of life, causing many hardships for millions of
221 Americans. As an Internet connection became a daily
222 necessity, Congress enacted over \$10 billion in funds to
223 support broadband adoption by low-income Americans, and to
224 help those who were struggling during the pandemic stay
225 connected. While that money has not yet been made available,
226 we must make sure it goes to those who are the hardest hit.

227 We must study the landscape of what our country looks

228 like after the billions of dollars made available in funding
229 is distributed. Congress cannot continue to blindly spend
230 billions of hard-earned taxpayer money without knowing where
231 the money is needed, and what problems are left to solve. As
232 much of the research on broadband adoption has shown, there
233 is not a clear indication of what factors contribute to non-
234 adoption. Policymakers must be clear-eyed on what the
235 barriers are before trying to propose solutions.

236 I expect we will hear a lot today about the need to put
237 the government in control of broadband rates so that more
238 Americans will be able to afford it. I would urge the
239 committee to be thoughtful about all the progress this
240 country has made in the past decade on broadband technology
241 before rushing to radically undermine the current system. We
242 can and should meaningfully boast -- or, pardon me, boost
243 broadband access and adoption by all Americans. But throwing
244 money at the problem without understanding the facts will
245 only waste taxpayer money and not solve the problem.

246 Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time to try
247 to keep on schedule for today. Thank you.

248 [The prepared statement of Mr. Latta follows:]

249

250 *****COMMITTEE INSERT*****

251

252 *Mr. Doyle. I thank the gentleman. The gentleman
253 yields back. The chair now recognizes Mr. Pallone, the
254 chairman of the full committee, for five minutes for his
255 opening statement.

256 *The Chairman. Thank you, Chairman Doyle. We are here
257 today to talk about equity in broadband, and the very real
258 disparities that exist in broadband access and affordability.
259 And these disparities create a tremendous gap in the
260 educational outcomes, available health services, and job
261 prospects between households that have broadband and those
262 that do not. And the gap has become even more apparent since
263 the beginning of the COVID pandemic, as we have seen a wide
264 range of services and opportunities move online, including
265 online schooling and virtual meetings. And we increasingly
266 become a digital first nation that has to ensure that
267 everyone has the same ability to access and use the Internet
268 to participate in society.

269 So for too long, the term "digital divide" has been
270 used to characterize the differences in quality and speed of
271 Internet networks in rural areas, compared to those in urban
272 areas, and there is no doubt that government must step in and
273 invest where the marketplace doesn't support the business
274 case for private broadband investment in any community in our
275 nation.

276 But that is just the start. Studies have shown that,

277 within all sorts of different communities, broadband service
278 isn't always available or of equal quality. Certain
279 communities somehow always find themselves at the back of the
280 line when it comes to upgrades to the networks.

281 And it is also disappointing that there is a digital
282 divide between races and ethnicities when it comes to
283 broadband access. While 80 percent of White households have
284 broadband access, that is true of only 70 percent of Black
285 households and 65 percent of Hispanic households. There was
286 a Deutsche Bank study that found that Black and Hispanic
287 Americans are 10 years behind White Americans in terms of
288 broadband access, severely hampering their long-term
289 employment and earning prospects.

290 And it doesn't end there. Lack of access to home
291 broadband also harms scores in schools, and dims the
292 employment prospects of students. So we are here to discuss
293 how best to address these inequities.

294 And it is not as simple as ensuring that broadband
295 networks are built to these communities. It is not just
296 build-out. That is a critical first step. But affordability
297 is a major barrier to broadband adoption for low-income
298 communities. In fact, some studies have estimated that, of
299 the households that do not have broadband, three times as
300 many of them are located in urban areas than in rural areas.
301 So having a network that runs right to your doorstep doesn't

302 mean that these families can pay the monthly cost of the
303 service.

304 So we came together, Democrats and Republicans, in
305 December to pass the Emergency Broadband Benefit, which will
306 provide struggling families a discount of \$50 off the monthly
307 cost of their home Internet service. That is discount for --
308 is \$75 a month for tribal lands. And the FCC is set to roll
309 out the benefit next week. So I hope we can all work
310 together to make that program a success.

311 But again, affordability is going to continue to be a
312 problem for some families, even after that program ends,
313 because they may have the build-out, they may hook up, and
314 they may be able to afford the bill, but they don't know how
315 to use the Internet. So they have to be trained. So we have
316 to ensure that all Americans have the skills necessary for
317 themselves and their families for the jobs of tomorrow.

318 So these are all tough problems, but they are problems
319 that we can solve. Ensuring that all Americans can be part
320 of the digital economy will make our nation stronger, more
321 economically competitive, and will help us continue to lead
322 the digital revolution.

323 And I look forward to hearing from the witnesses, as
324 Chairman Doyle said, about solutions, how we get there, and
325 look forward to both sides of the aisle working on
326 legislation to make this happen.

327 [The prepared statement of The Chairman follows:]

328

329 *****COMMITTEE INSERT*****

330

331 *The Chairman. So I think I have about a minute-and-a-
332 half left. I can't yield it back, Mr. Chairman. I have to
333 -- I want to yield it to Mr. McNerney.

334 *Mr. McNerney. I thank the chair for yielding and for
335 your opening statement.

336 I represent a district that is one of the most racially
337 and ethnically diverse in the country. It is also a low-
338 income district. Too many of my constituents are struggling
339 just to get by. Not having a broadband service at home has
340 set them even further back in today's world. Even for those
341 who live in areas where broadband has been deployed, many
342 simply can't afford the service. And there are many who
343 don't have the necessary digital skills to use broadband
344 services. And this is the case for many communities around
345 the country.

346 There is a wealth of opportunities for anyone, if they
347 can -- if they are able to close the gaps in broadband
348 adoption and invest in digital skills. That is why I have
349 introduced the Digital Equity Act. I am pleased that the
350 bill will be introduced and included in the Lift Act, and I
351 hope that we will be able to move quickly to pass this
352 critical legislation.

353

354

355

356 [The prepared statement of Mr. McNerney follows:]

357

358 *****COMMITTEE INSERT*****

359

360 *Mr. McNerney. And guess what, Mr. Chairman? I am
361 going to yield back 30 seconds.
362

363 *Mr. Doyle. I thank the gentleman. The chairman yields
364 back. The chair now recognizes Mrs. McMorris Rodgers,
365 ranking member of the full committee, for five minutes for
366 her opening statement.

367 *Mrs. Rodgers. Good morning, everyone. I want to thank
368 our witnesses for coming before our committee today.

369 Access to broadband in eastern Washington and across our
370 country has never been more important than during the COVID-
371 19 pandemic to work from home, to educate our children,
372 access health care through telehealth, connect with our loved
373 ones, maintain our communities of worship, and even to do
374 remote hearings. We have continued our work to close the
375 digital divide for the most remote and underserved areas,
376 which is so important for me. I am grateful for the work of
377 this committee to pass mapping legislation that was signed
378 into law, over a year ago now, to update our maps so that we
379 better target our efforts.

380 In the United States millions of Americans do have
381 access to reliable connections, and much of this is possible
382 because of the critical investments made by broadband
383 providers over the last decade, which is why, during the
384 pandemic, American broadband networks rose to the challenge
385 by increasing speeds and capacity, while facing unprecedented
386 demands for access.

387 Unlike their European counterparts, American broadband

388 providers were never forced to reduce streaming speeds or
389 content quality. This is no accident. U.S. providers have
390 invested more than 1.8 trillion in broadband infrastructure
391 in recent decades, and spent more than 3 times as much per
392 household per year in companies in the EU. These investments
393 have not only paid dividends in terms of fast speeds, high
394 performance, economic growth, and job creation, but also in
395 creating competition and making broadband more affordable.

396 Thanks to competitive pressures, innovation, and a
397 light-touch regulatory environment, broadband prices have
398 seen a significant decline over the past decade. It is no
399 surprise that, over the last six years, we have seen an
400 increase in broadband adoption numbers across the United
401 States.

402 These trends must continue. They must, so we fully
403 close the digital divide in both rural and urban communities.
404 It is critical for families to be connected to have a more
405 secure future, and a better quality of life. Health care,
406 education, economic opportunity are dependent on
407 connectivity.

408 Just think about children who lost an entire year and
409 counting on education because schools are closed, and they
410 have no Internet access. What does the future look like for
411 them? Or their parents, including millions of women and
412 working moms, who dropped out of the workforce because remote

413 work wasn't an option for them?

414 We must rely on solutions that work to boost access and
415 unleash opportunities; solutions that support American
416 prosperity, ingenuity, and free enterprise; solutions like
417 the 28 bills in the Boosting Broadband Connectivity Agenda
418 that would remove unnecessary barriers that stand in the way
419 of innovation and investment. There is bipartisan agreement
420 that all Americans should have access to broadband at
421 affordable prices, regardless of their address.

422 As a result of the pandemic we all have recognized this
423 need, it has been underscored, and I was proud that
424 Republicans and Democrats came together to enact the 3.2
425 billion Emergency Broadband Benefit program to help. This
426 was the right way to take action, given these circumstances.
427 And it will help people access reliable broadband.

428 This committee also recognized the valuable
429 contributions of private providers who voluntarily signed the
430 Keep Americans Connected pledge, and committed not to
431 disconnect anyone due to their inability to pay.

432 Now we need to study these efforts on broadband
433 adoption. These policies proposed today include federally-
434 regulating the rates that private companies can charge for
435 broadband services. The proposal today would prioritize,
436 unfortunately, inefficient government-run networks at the
437 expense of private networks, and create arbitrary speed

438 thresholds that favor fiber-only projects, with no
439 restrictions to prevent overbuilding in areas where broadband
440 already exists.

441 We all want to close the digital divide, but the only
442 way to truly achieve this is to lead with solutions that
443 drive results. Let's focus on what is going to get results,
444 not on more government-centralized power. Studies have
445 suggested that, for broadband affordability, private
446 companies must have better incentives to increase adoption.
447 Research from the Technology Policy Institute found that
448 private companies have succeeded in increasing broadband
449 adoption, where digital literacy training has failed.

450 And Mr. Chairman, I request unanimous consent to enter
451 this study into the record.

452 *Mr. Doyle. Without objection, so ordered.

453 [The information follows:]

454

455 *****COMMITTEE INSERT*****

456

457 *Mrs. Rodgers. We must closely inspect the impact that
458 the recently-appropriated three trillion will have on the
459 communications industry, and our economy, and in order to
460 avoid enacting burdensome policies. Let's start there.

461 [The prepared statement of Mrs. Rodgers follows:]

462

463 *****COMMITTEE INSERT*****

464

465 *Mrs. Rodgers. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield
466 back.

467 *Mr. Doyle. The gentlewoman yields back. The chair
468 would like to remind members that, pursuant to committee
469 rules, all members' written opening statements shall be made
470 part of the record.

471 Now I would like to introduce our witnesses for today's
472 hearing.

473 Ms. Joi Chaney, executive director of the Washington
474 Bureau, and senior vice president for advocacy and policy of
475 the National Urban League.

476 Dr. George S. Floyd (sic), chief economist, Phoenix
477 Center for Advanced Legal and Economic Public Policy Studies.

478 Ms. Francella Ochillo, executive director, Next Century
479 Cities.

480 And Mr. Chris Lewis, president and chief executive
481 officer, Public Knowledge.

482 We want to thank all our witnesses for joining us today.
483 We look forward to your testimony, and at this time the chair
484 will recognize each witness for five minutes to provide their
485 opening statement. We will start with Ms. Chaney.

486 You are recognized for five minutes.

487

488 STATEMENT OF JOI CHANEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WASHINGTON
489 BUREAU, AND SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF ADVOCACY AND POLICY,
490 NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE; GEORGE S. FORD, CHIEF ECONOMIST,
491 PHOENIX CENTER FOR ADVANCED LEGAL AND ECONOMIC PUBLIC POLICY
492 STUDIES; FRANCELLA OCHILLO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NEXT CENTURY
493 CITIES; AND CHRIS LEWIS, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE
494 OFFICER, PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

495

496 STATEMENT OF JOI CHANEY

497

498 *Ms. Chaney. Thank you. Good morning, Subcommittee
499 Chairman Doyle, Subcommittee Ranking Member, Latta, Committee
500 Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers, and
501 members of the subcommittee. My name is Joi Chaney, and I
502 serve as senior vice president of policy and advocacy, and
503 executive director of the Washington Bureau for the National
504 Urban League. I bring you greetings on behalf of Marc
505 Morial, our president and CEO.

506 The National Urban League is an historic civil rights
507 organization dedicated to providing economic empowerment,
508 educational opportunities, and to the guarantee of civil
509 rights for the underserved in America. I am honored to
510 testify today about one of the most serious issues facing our
511 nation and the Urban League movement, including the more than
512 two million people we serve through direct services: the

513 digital and broadband divide.

514 Rarely does an issue have implications across so many
515 indicia of equity, including racial justice, gender equity,
516 economic opportunity, health care, education, and workforce
517 development. In recognition of this, the Urban League
518 developed the Lewis Latimer Plan for Digital Equity and
519 Inclusion to address a comprehensive set of goals and gaps:
520 deploying networks everywhere, that is addressing the
521 availability gap; getting everyone connected, that is
522 addressing the adoption, including the unaffordability and
523 the digital literacy gap; using the networks to improve how
524 we deliver essential services and, in particular, workforce
525 development, health care, and education, addressing the
526 utilization gap; and finally, creating new economic
527 opportunities to participate in the growth of the digital
528 economy.

529 On the availability gap, as many of you have already
530 echoed, for millions of Americans there is no available
531 broadband network capable of allowing them to participate
532 fully in 21st-century life. This is generally a rural
533 America problem that must be addressed, including for the
534 millions of rural Americans who are also people of color, and
535 who span the economic divide. Rural is not, after all,
536 synonymous with Caucasian. That is why we applaud efforts by
537 the Biden Administration with the American Jobs Plan, as well

538 as members of the Energy and Commerce Committee with the Lift
539 America Act and the many bills that are contained within it.

540 As these bills make their way through Congress, however,
541 we charge you with embracing the full scope of the Latimer
542 Plan by addressing the full set of gaps contributing to the
543 digital divide. Only then will you meet the needs of the
544 nation, especially for communities of color and communities
545 earning lower incomes.

546 Among those Americans for whom a broadband network is
547 available, there are still tens of millions who have not
548 adopted broadband in their home. Indeed, the adoption gap is
549 approximately three times larger than the availability gap.
550 The reason? Lack of affordability and lack of digital
551 readiness. As such, it does not help much to have lightning-
552 fast broadband at your door if you cannot afford to subscribe
553 to it. This is why we are so supportive of the Emergency
554 Broadband Benefit: it addresses affordability.

555 But our goal is not to return to pre-pandemic inequity
556 once the emergency is over. We need to fund programs that
557 provide long-term, sustainable support for the poorest
558 Americans, a disproportionate number of whom are men, women,
559 and children of color. We cannot, in this moment of big
560 ideas and big investments, solve for rural America's problem,
561 while leaving behind urban America, or ask urban America to
562 wait on market principles. The stakes of the digital divide

563 are too high for that.

564 Hopefully, in Q&A we can address how we could pay for
565 such a program. Other -- the other half of the adoption gap,
566 digital readiness, that is important, and the need for
567 digital navigator, as well as the utilization gap.

568 But before I end, I wouldn't be the Urban League if I
569 did not address the fourth prong for us, and that is gaps in
570 access to wealth generation created by broadband and digital
571 technologies. For the record, industry must ensure job
572 opportunities are available for the country's growing Black
573 and Latinx communities at every level in technology and
574 technology-related industries. Entrepreneurs of color
575 deserve a place in the governance of these companies. They
576 should have equitable access as vendors and collaborators in
577 building a utilization of new digital infrastructures, and
578 the prolific wealth-creating ecosystem that controls it.

579 To this end, the National Urban League urges Congress
580 and corporate America to aggressively and comprehensively
581 address digital-divide issues contained in the Latimer Plan,
582 and to consider our recommendations for solving those issues.
583 This includes by considering and funding sustainable, long-
584 term, and permanent -- a permanent broadband benefit.

585 Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I look
586 forward to answering your questions.

587

588 [The prepared statement of Ms. Chaney follows:]

589

590 *****COMMITTEE INSERT*****

591

592 *Mr. Doyle. Thank you very much, Ms. Chaney. The chair
593 will now recognize Mr. Ford.

594 You are recognized for five minutes.

595

596 STATEMENT OF GEORGE S. FORD

597

598 *Dr. Ford. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members. In the
599 U.S. today, over 90 percent of homes have access to broadband
600 Internet service, nearly 90 percent have access to 1 gigabit
601 Internet service, and nearly 90 percent of Americans have a
602 high-speed connection in the home. Almost all providers
603 offer low-income households a quality broadband connection
604 for between 10 and \$20. Broadband is widely available,
605 highly subscribed, and mostly affordable. These statistics
606 are impressive.

607 And then there is the 10 percent with none of it. I
608 understand that is why we are here today. It is an important
609 issue. As you try to close this gap, the first thing to do
610 is to focus on the 10 percent, not the 90 percent. You will
611 be tempted otherwise, but maintain focus on the problem.
612 Don't mess up the 90 to get to the 10. We do not need
613 dramatic reform of the broadband network. We need to adjust
614 incentives at the margin.

615 The fact broadband is not deployed to every nook and
616 cranny of the country is unsurprising. Broadband networks
617 are expensive to deploy, especially in rural areas, where the
618 revenues can't cover cost. This is not a market failure. We
619 see the same lack of rural areas for nearly every business,
620 and even for government services. Rural markets are

621 underserved across the board, simply because the markets are
622 small and cost may be high. That is part of the charm:
623 rural Americans don't pay \$200 a month to park a car, or
624 \$1,500 a month for a studio apartment.

625 If you want broadband everywhere, then subsidies must
626 cover the spread between costs and revenues. We know this.
627 We do this. The FCC has billions to support broadband
628 deployment in underserved areas, and a reasonable mechanism
629 to distribute it. I recommend continued support, and maybe
630 enhanced support with the FCC in its efforts. In those
631 efforts, the FCC provides subsidy dollars only to unserved
632 and some underserved areas, and only to a single provider.
633 That is the correct approach.

634 Subsidizing multiple firms or subsidizing competition is
635 irrational. Whatever benefits the state competition produces
636 is more than offset by the cost to other persons living
637 outside the subsidized market who are taxed to pay for the
638 subsidized competition. I am taxed to pay for a government-
639 run network in Chattanooga. I live in Alabama. If anyone
640 tells you subsidized competition is a good policy, I
641 encourage you to make them demonstrate by what economic
642 mechanism that is so. Wishful thinking is not a logical
643 argument.

644 Why people don't accept -- broadband is a more
645 complicated matter. While advocates tend to focus on price,

646 price is not the main reason people don't have broadband in
647 the home. Far more people are just uninterested. I can't
648 blame them for that. For some, a mobile or Wi-Fi connection
649 is plenty adequate, a valid choice. People are allowed to
650 have their own preferences.

651 As for the racial digital divide, the differences in the
652 demand for broadband by some racial minorities persist, even
653 after adjusting for income, education, age, and so forth.
654 Why this is so is not, to my knowledge, fully understood. So
655 addressing such differences will be challenging. You can't
656 fix the problem when you don't know what is causing it.

657 Literacy programs have not proven effective. In any
658 case, it is worth investigation.

659 Native Americans have less access, which is well-
660 established and warrants solution. And also lower demand.

661 As for price, almost all low-income Americans can get a
662 low-price plan today within a mechanism that will look much
663 like any subsidy program you create. Some qualified
664 households use these programs and some don't. Before making
665 a long-term commitment to a subsidy program, I recommend you
666 figure out why.

667 The Lifeline program has existed for decades, yet a
668 relatively small share of eligible households bother to
669 participate.

670 There are also murmurings of price regulation. Rate

671 regulation will rob the broadband providers of their
672 motivation to expand deployment and upgrade networks. Even
673 when the government offers broadband, the retail prices are
674 the same as private providers. It costs money to provide
675 broadband, and prices reflect that.

676 And it pays to remember the failure of cable regulation
677 in the early 1990s, a policy Congress abandoned only a few
678 years after it started. I am afraid, if you get too focused
679 on price as a solution to the adoption gap, you will be
680 disappointed with the results. It will work for some, but
681 not all.

682 And speaking of government-owned networks, I recommend
683 to you a recent paper of mine on the law on economics of
684 municipal broadband published in the Federal Communications
685 Law Journal. It is a comprehensive analysis.

686 While I am not opposed to government broadband, per se,
687 it is an extreme policy by any standard, and should be
688 limited to unserved markets that even the subsidized private
689 provider won't serve. It is last on the long list of
690 options, an act of desperation. For obvious reasons, these
691 systems often fail financially, leaving the cost on the backs
692 of constituents, often in the form of higher electricity
693 rates, especially burdensome to the poor.

694 Government systems do not offer lower prices. Efforts
695 to say otherwise are poorly done. As I have shown in detail,

696 once you correct for a few obvious errors, such as using a
697 price of \$10 in Idaho, when the true cost is closer to \$50
698 when you include the necessary utility fee and what amounts
699 to a 20-year mortgage on a \$3,000 connection fee, municipal
700 systems charge about the same price, if not a little higher.

701 And while there is talk of preempting state laws that
702 limit cross-subsidization of these networks, it is not clear
703 you can lawfully do so. It is a gamble, at best.

704 *Mr. Doyle. Will the gentleman --

705 *Dr. Ford. There is a lingering due process claim that
706 is yet to be litigated. But if it ever is, it might spell
707 the end of municipal broadband.

708 *Mr. Doyle. The gentleman needs to wrap up. You are 38
709 seconds past the 5 minutes.

710 *Dr. Ford. I am through. Yes, cities play a regulatory
711 role in the broadband marketplace, and you cannot be both
712 regulator and competitor.

713 Thank you for your time.

714 [The prepared statement of Dr. Ford follows:]

715

716 *****COMMITTEE INSERT*****

717

718 *Mr. Doyle. I thank the gentleman.

719 The chair now recognizes Ms. Ochillo for five minutes.

720

721 STATEMENT OF FRANCELLA OCHILLO

722

723 *Ms. Ochillo. Good morning, Chairman, Committee
724 Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member McMorris, Subcommittee Chair
725 Doyle, and Ranking Member Latta, as well as members of the
726 subcommittee. Thank you for making this issue a priority,
727 and inviting Next Century Cities to be a partner in this
728 hearing.

729 We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization of over 200
730 member municipalities across the U.S. We support mayors and
731 local officials who are working to ensure that their
732 residents have affordable and reliable broadband. We spend a
733 lot of time listening. We document local insights, and we
734 fill in information gaps for local leaders who had to tackle
735 access and adoption issues on their own.

736 In Vermont, for example, where 20 percent of residents
737 struggle with reliable access and affordability, towns form
738 alliances of two or more called communications union
739 districts to help deploy their own broadband.

740 Six hundred miles away, the Detroit Community Technology
741 Project developed a digital steward model to train
742 neighborhood leaders to build and maintain their own wireless
743 networks.

744 In Oklahoma, Osage Nation partnered with the City of
745 Pawhuska to create a public Wi-Fi system to ensure that

746 indigenous residents that were living in city limits were
747 able to get online.

748 All of these community leaders know that, wherever
749 broadband is ubiquitous, residents have power. They can
750 access information, they can start businesses, they can have
751 access to care, and age in place. Students can dream far
752 beyond what is possible in their hometowns, and people living
753 with disabilities can have better access to the technology
754 that improves their daily lives. Aside from supporting
755 participation in this democracy, broadband also keeps us
756 connected to each other.

757 But on the flip side, there is a vicious cycle of
758 opportunity loss and economic starvation in the communities
759 that are on the wrong side of the digital divide. Residents
760 in these unserved or underserved areas are often times
761 limited by their income or their geography. Lower benchmarks
762 for education, specialized care, and innovation stunts the
763 overall growth of the area. Gaps in access means that their
764 workforce is unable to fully participate in the high-skilled
765 jobs in a knowledge-based economy.

766 There are drastically different outcomes in the
767 communities where broadband is scarce, and people are unable
768 to adopt. Research shows that indigenous, Black, and Brown
769 residents are among the most disparately impacted. And when
770 they are locked out of the benefits of digital citizenship,

771 there is a compound effect on a household, on generational
772 wealth, on local, state, and federal economies, and society
773 writ large.

774 The most economically resilient communities recognize
775 broadband as essential infrastructure. It supports local
776 efforts to fight poverty, it creates jobs, and it helps local
777 officials achieve more equitable outcomes for residents.
778 There are also long-term returns that cannot always be
779 recorded on a balance sheet.

780 But here we are, and this is urgent. There is a lack of
781 imagination on how we are approaching a nationwide strategy
782 to close the digital divide. This is an issue that requires
783 addressing access and adoption, not either/or. It requires
784 collaboration at every level of government, innovative
785 partnership ideas, and a willingness to embrace new models,
786 because we don't have any other choice.

787 Current broadband deployment strategies have failed too
788 many communities, leaving large urban and rural areas behind,
789 simply in the dark. And any comprehensive plan, it requires
790 the partnership from municipal, cooperative, mesh, and other
791 nontraditional networks that are willing to serve areas where
792 traditional providers have simply refused to go. Each model
793 allows communities to serve residents that have no other
794 option, and they also have public accountability in a way
795 that private companies simply don't, especially when the

796 people who build, design, and manage those networks are not
797 only residents, they use the service themselves.

798 Municipal networks, they also offer some of the fastest
799 speed and higher -- and highest quality connectivity. They
800 are also known for transparent pricing, symmetrical tier
801 service, and maintaining affordability programs for low-
802 income residents that are not voluntary.

803 We also know that inaccurate broadband maps are
804 sabotaging our collective efforts. Without knowing who does
805 and does not have broadband, it is impossible to direct
806 resources that -- the communities that are in the most need.
807 Federal broadband maps are well known to overstate
808 deployment, and it is a problem with serious consequences.
809 Many states actually rely on FCC data as the baseline to
810 target funding at communities when they are marked as
811 unserved or underserved, but then local leaders are forced to
812 challenge those maps with their own data or speed test,
813 rather than being invited in as data collection partners in
814 the first place.

815 Finally, investing in digital equity and inclusion
816 programs, that is central to increasing broadband adoption.
817 Broadband adoption is an indicator of economic growth and
818 prosperity in every state. Yet federal broadband policy is
819 focused exclusively on broadband deployment, leaving local
820 governments and state governments to fend for themselves.

821 At Next Century Cities, we believe that the digital
822 divide is a problem that we can solve, and we also see equity
823 as a bedrock principle in any solution. But we are running
824 out of time, and it costs us something to have good ideas in
825 incubation. So I appreciate --

826 *Mr. Doyle. I would ask that you wrap up. You are also
827 half a minute past your time.

828 *Ms. Ochillo. And we appreciate you having this
829 conversation, and we look forward to an opportunity to work
830 together.

831 [The prepared statement of Ms. Ochillo follows:]

832

833 *****COMMITTEE INSERT*****

834

835 *Mr. Doyle. Thank you very much.

836 The chair now recognizes Mr. Lewis for five minutes.

837

838 STATEMENT OF CHRIS LEWIS

839

840 *Mr. Lewis. Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member Latta,
841 Chairman Doyle, and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers, thank
842 you for inviting me to this important hearing today.

843 Our country is facing a unique opportunity about
844 broadband right now. We have bipartisan support in the
845 Congress for addressing the broadband digital divide. The
846 country supports Congress taking action, due to the way in
847 which the COVID pandemic has shown every household just how
848 essential a robust, affordable, and reliable broadband
849 connection is to every American.

850 The challenge in front of us is to make sure that the
851 policy actions that we take are comprehensive enough to
852 address all the drivers of the digital divide, because it is
853 clear that the policy and marketplace structures in the
854 decade leading up to the pandemic were inadequate to the
855 task, and left many communities behind.

856 I have personally met and heard from individuals who
857 have been left out by the current policies and structures of
858 investment. When I was a staffer at the FCC, I was sometimes
859 asked by congressional staff if I could talk with a
860 constituent who was impacted by the high cost of rural
861 deployment, or the digital redlining decisions made by a
862 broadband provider. They would share how all they wanted was

863 for the high-speed broadband that was available down the
864 street or in the next neighborhood to be extended to them.
865 They would say they had spoken to the provider, who had
866 decided that they either would not or could not extend
867 service those additional few blocks.

868 And then I would have to share the unfortunate news that
869 there were no current rules at the FCC that could require the
870 company to extend service to them. These broadband
871 connections could be the difference between that constituent
872 finding a job or starting a business without leaving the
873 community that they love.

874 And six years on the local school board in Alexandria,
875 Virginia, I saw the impact of poverty on educational equity.
876 Alexandria is a dense, small city -- a fairly affluent city
877 also, but with a high poverty student population. A majority
878 of our students are Latinx and Black, and a significant
879 percentage of our families have immigrated from around the
880 world. Alexandria's public schools use technology to offer
881 many options and support for students to succeed, and for
882 parents to support their students' education.

883 Teachers suggest online tools to pre-teach and re-teach
884 topics outside of normal class hours to help students who are
885 working at a different level or a different pace. Parents
886 can closely monitor their child's performance in online
887 platforms, and are encouraged to communicate with busy

888 teachers over email. Our alternative high school campus is
889 over 10 years old now, offering flexible hours and largely
890 online classes for students who need to work to support their
891 families, or are on an accelerated program. These
892 innovations are limited for many families who can't afford
893 the high cost of broadband in their home from the one option
894 available in our city.

895 These real-life examples are inequity -- these real-life
896 examples of inequity disproportionately touch our most
897 marginalized communities, from rural and tribal communities,
898 communities of color, and low-income households found in
899 rural, suburban, and urban communities alike. To fully close
900 the digital divide, we must do more than simply fund
901 broadband providers to build more. In my written testimony I
902 provided many ideas, but in the short time I want to
903 highlight four key ideas to directly address the challenge of
904 affordability, and the inequities of digital redlining.

905 Congress recognized the affordability need when it
906 authorized Emergency Broadband Benefit last year. However,
907 low-income Americans will still need support beyond the COVID
908 crisis. It is time for Congress to create a long-term
909 solution for low-income broadband support.

910 There are several ways that Congress can pay for these
911 critical supports, including through a reform of the
912 Universal Service Fund Contribution System to include

913 broadband, and lowering the size of the fee on people's phone
914 bills.

915 Congress could also create a supplement -- create or
916 supplement a long-term benefit. Appropriations are an
917 option, too, but would raise the concern of predictability
918 with the annual political process. Whatever the funding
919 mechanism, it must provide predictability and sustainable,
920 long-term funding.

921 Funding for devices for low-income families would also
922 make sure that parents don't have to choose between two kids'
923 homework needs or their own.

924 In addition to long-term, low-income broadband funding,
925 Congress should promote policies that encourage actual
926 competition in local broadband markets, such as open access
927 networks and broadband builds supported or led by local
928 government or regional co-ops.

929 The FCC should be charged to study and report on
930 broadband competition, including collecting actual costs and
931 actual price data where they are, and where they are
932 available.

933 Finally, we also need the FCC to be empowered to address
934 digital redlining. Several examples of redlining have been
935 studied and reported by journalists and nonprofits over the
936 years in cities like Cleveland, Dallas, and Kansas City.
937 Congress should begin this work by requiring the FCC to study

938 the full scope of the redlining problem, and take remedial
939 steps to ensure every household has access to robust,
940 affordable broadband.

941 Thank you for your work on this important issue, and I
942 look forward to your questions.

943 [The prepared statement of Mr. Lewis follows:]

944

945 *****COMMITTEE INSERT*****

946

947 *Mr. Doyle. Thank you, Mr. Lewis. That concludes our
948 witnesses' opening statements. We are now going to move to
949 member questions.

950 Each member will have five minutes to ask questions of
951 our witnesses. I ask all of my colleagues to try to stay in
952 that five-minute range for us. So I will start by
953 recognizing myself for five minutes.

954 Ms. Ochillo, your organization has long advocated that
955 cities and municipalities can benefit from having the
956 flexibility to build broadband networks that fit their own
957 needs. What are these benefits, and how have cities and
958 municipalities that built their own networks responded to the
959 pandemic?

960 *Ms. Ochillo. Well, thank you for the question. And
961 one of the things that we think is most important to say at
962 the outset is that we believe that communities should have
963 the choice to decide what type of network they need to have.
964 Sometimes that is going to mean partnering with the providers
965 that are already in their market. Sometimes that means they
966 are going to have to go it alone and build maybe a municipal
967 network, an open-access network. They might have to partner
968 with other counties and municipalities.

969 But we think that it is important that they actually
970 have choice, and that, especially, when we are talking about
971 communities that have had to go it alone, specifically in

972 municipal networks, it takes a lot of community buy-in,
973 building resources, and planning to actually launch those
974 networks. But once they are up and running, they provide
975 some of the fastest service, some of the best speeds. And a
976 lot of the times they have accountability measures because
977 the people who are running those networks live in those
978 communities.

979 And quite frankly, we know that the current model is not
980 getting to every household in our communities, so we think
981 that it is really important to be able to support, whether it
982 is a municipal network, a mesh network, an open access
983 network for communities to actually be able to have choice to
984 determine their own broadband future.

985 *Mr. Doyle. Thank you.

986 Mr. Lewis, I know your organization also has advocated
987 for these types of networks. Do you want to add anything to
988 that?

989 *Mr. Lewis. Well, I certainly agree with Ms. Ochillo,
990 the choice of different types of buildings is important for
991 local communities, so that they can take the risk that is
992 appropriate to their communities' needs.

993 *Mr. Doyle. Let me ask you this, Mr. Lewis. You talk
994 about digital redlining in your testimony. How can
995 legislation like the Accessible, Affordable Internet for All
996 Act, the Lift America Act, and the American Jobs Plan address

997 digital redlining?

998 *Mr. Lewis. I think if the bill includes options for
999 those subsidies, or those -- that funding to go to local
1000 governments or local co-ops, it can certainly also help with
1001 redlining. As Ms. Ochillo said, those communities usually
1002 are better at making sure that everyone is served, because
1003 they live in those communities, or those government officials
1004 live in those communities. And so they have an incentive to
1005 make sure that whatever is built is --

1006 *Mr. Doyle. Ms. Chaney, do you want to add anything to
1007 that?

1008 *Ms. Chaney. Sorry. No, I think the other witnesses
1009 answered it appropriately, yes.

1010 *Mr. Doyle. Okay, well, let me go back to Mr. Lewis,
1011 then.

1012 In your testimony you talked about the need for a
1013 permanent broadband benefit, and the need for additional
1014 measures to increase affordability, long term. Do you think
1015 that we can close the digital divide over the long term if
1016 we -- without addressing those issues?

1017 *Mr. Lewis. I am concerned that we won't. The cost of
1018 broadband right now, just from what we see from the numbers
1019 of how many options that people have, is really driven by
1020 monopoly or duopoly prices. I think that doing the work to
1021 study the prices and the cost of broadband long-term, so that

1022 we can really determine the impact of the market, and if that
1023 cost is actually affordable, or if it is simply a cost that
1024 is going up and up based on the choices of industries, is
1025 critically important.

1026 We have already seen in the last three years a 20
1027 percent rise in broadband costs, according to FCC data. That
1028 is far ahead of inflation. So these prices need to be
1029 studied.

1030 *Mr. Doyle. How about you, Ms. Chaney? Do you have
1031 anything you want to add to that?

1032 *Ms. Chaney. So, I mean, we absolutely think that a
1033 broadband benefit is necessary. We also are -- you know, we
1034 also want to see competition addressed. We also want to see
1035 prices come down.

1036 But we know that, for the vast majority of those who
1037 need it most, there will always be some amount of help that
1038 they need. And we found this in other areas where we have a
1039 benefit that -- a need that has to be addressed that is
1040 fundamental, and we believe broadband is as fundamental as
1041 running water, electricity, all kinds of basic services.

1042 And so, for us, we know that there are communities, in
1043 particular communities of color, who will need assistance.
1044 And so, for us, there has to be some kind of benefit that is
1045 made available for them. And we think there have to be
1046 public-private partnerships that make it happen.

1047 *Mr. Doyle. Well, thank you. The chair will yield 24
1048 seconds back, as an example, and now recognize Mr. Latta, the
1049 ranking member of the subcommittee, for five minutes to ask
1050 questions.

1051 *Mr. Latta. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1052 Mr. Ford, we hear from our colleagues across the aisle
1053 and in the Administration that Americans pay too much for the
1054 Internet, and that high prices remain the top obstacle to
1055 broadband adoption.

1056 Similarly, the Open Technology Institute's Cost of
1057 Connectivity Report tells us there is a broadband
1058 affordability crisis in the U.S. The facts, however, seem to
1059 be at odds with this claim.

1060 Based on data from the FCC's annual Urban Rate Survey,
1061 there was an average decline of 36 percent in broadband
1062 prices between 2015 and 2020. This price decline coincides
1063 with steadily increasing broadband subscribership over the
1064 past 5 years, according to the FCC's 2020 Communications
1065 Marketplace Report.

1066 Additionally, a study done by the Brookings Institute
1067 finds the gap in broadband adoption rates between the high-
1068 income and low-income Americans is narrowing, which shows
1069 that the adoption gap is becoming less based on income
1070 disparity.

1071 Mr. Ford, is it true that there is a broadband

1072 affordability crisis in the U.S.?

1073 And what are your thoughts about the OTI study?

1074 *Dr. Ford. I mean, I think certainly, for some people
1075 there will always be an affordability problem in low-income
1076 groups, primarily, who struggle just to survive and eat.
1077 That is an issue that you may need to address. And some of
1078 the other witnesses have spoken to that. There are many
1079 plans today that are very low-priced, 10 to \$20. Comcast is
1080 at about \$10 for a very capable broadband circuit for
1081 qualified low-income, veterans, and other people that qualify
1082 for the program. So that is a very low price.

1083 I mean, if broadband is an essential service, and
1084 someone is not willing to pay \$10 for that, then I think we
1085 have to question whether or not it is an essential service
1086 for that person. I think the essentiality and necessity
1087 varies by person. We can't tell people what their
1088 preferences are about broadband. Some people just might not
1089 want it.

1090 I think that prices -- my analysis -- I have done an
1091 extensive analysis of the FCC data on prices, and prices have
1092 declined as quality has increased. I think that is hard to
1093 dispute, at least if you want to look at the data properly.

1094 As for the OTI report, it had several pieces, components
1095 to it. One was that municipal networks charge lower prices
1096 than private providers. I have a detailed analysis of that

1097 study. It was incorrect in the way it set up the problem.
1098 It was incorrect in the way it treated some data. And once
1099 you correct the problems, you find there is really no
1100 difference between municipal systems and private systems. In
1101 fact, if anything, municipal systems charge slightly more. I
1102 don't believe that is probably the case, but that is what
1103 their data actually show.

1104 The case which I mentioned in my statement, for example,
1105 shows that the -- that they had a \$10 price and, really, it
1106 is more about \$50. And once you correct that error, you
1107 solve the problem.

1108 Internationally -- and I noticed that was being floated
1109 around yesterday, statistics from that report -- the report
1110 itself concludes on page 38 that, once you standardized the
1111 prices for cost and speed, that U.S. providers, on average,
1112 advertised similar prices for similar speeds as European
1113 providers. So the study itself denies what statistics were
1114 being thrown around yesterday.

1115 *Mr. Latta. With my last minute I am going to try to
1116 get a couple of other questions in here, real quick.

1117 You know, what is your response for the decline in
1118 broadband prices, and also the increases in subscribership in
1119 low-income households?

1120 *Dr. Ford. Well, like most goods, over time they tend
1121 to decline, as efficiencies and productivity enhancements

1122 arise. And we have -- people have options as to what they
1123 are buying. You couldn't even imagine buying a 200 megabit
1124 circuit, you know, 5 years ago. Now you can get one as a
1125 base-level product for \$40. That is a material decline in
1126 quality-adjusted prices, for sure, if not prices alone.

1127 The differences in consumption across racial groups is
1128 -- I can't explain it. I mean, it is persistent. It is
1129 shrinking. We saw significant shrinks -- a shrink in the gap
1130 last year, for Blacks, in particular. And that is something
1131 that just needs to be evaluated. Those differences persist,
1132 even with accounting for income and age and education and
1133 things like that. So it is there. I am not sure why it is
1134 there, and it is probably worth investigation.

1135 *Mr. Doyle. The gentleman's time has expired.

1136 *Mr. Latta. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. My time has
1137 expired, and I also have some documents that I will ask
1138 unanimous consent to submit for the record. But thank you
1139 very much, and my time has expired.

1140 *Mr. Doyle. Without objection, so ordered.

1141 [The information follows:]

1142

1143 *****COMMITTEE INSERT*****

1144

1145 *Mr. Doyle. The chair now recognizes Mr. Pallone, the
1146 full committee chair, for five minutes to ask questions.

1147 *The Chairman. Thank you, Chairman Doyle. I am going
1148 to try to get in three questions to each of three witnesses,
1149 so -- you know, if we can have a quick response.

1150 But I did want to say that we know that studies have
1151 documented the racial -- digital divide in the country. And
1152 during the pandemic, this often prevented kids from attending
1153 school online, or taking advantage of telehealth, or making a
1154 vaccine appointment. And I know it is not only the result of
1155 digital redlining, but also the cost of service that is too
1156 much for many households to pay. And I just think we have
1157 got to address this.

1158 So, Mr. Lewis, is there a risk that, if we don't act to
1159 resolve these inequalities, we leave households and
1160 communities behind? That would be my first question.

1161 *Mr. Lewis. Absolutely, Congressman. Our policies can
1162 help make up for inequities in our society, and -- or they
1163 can create inequities. In the past, communications laws have
1164 fought redlining, for example, through franchise agreements
1165 or other obligations at the FCC, franchise agreements at the
1166 local level for cable, to make sure that telecommunications
1167 was built out to everyone. Those were begun to be removed in
1168 the early 2000s, and we never saw any replacement for them in
1169 the broadband space. So policymaking can make up for these

1170 inequities or lack of investment into specific communities.

1171 *The Chairman. Thank you.

1172 Ms. Chaney, we mentioned that we have this Emergency
1173 Broadband Benefit, but it will run out, eventually. And we
1174 have heard a number of ideas today about ways to make
1175 broadband more affordable. But -- and during the pandemic,
1176 many providers announced offerings and plans to help ease the
1177 divide. There were about 600 companies signed up to offer
1178 now the Emergency Broadband Benefit. But I just think more
1179 needs to be done.

1180 So I want to ask, in your opinion, what else can
1181 Congress do to ensure that we are connected, especially when
1182 this Emergency Broadband Benefit runs out?

1183 *Ms. Chaney. Oh, thank you, Congressman. There is lots
1184 that we can do.

1185 I mean, first of all, we do believe that there should
1186 be, like, a permanent or a long-term broadband benefit
1187 subsidy to ensure that the extreme poor will be able to
1188 participate in a 21st-century economy. And there are ways
1189 that this can be funded, right, through annual congressional
1190 appropriations. But there can also be some kind of fund that
1191 -- a digital equity fund that is created by a combination of
1192 appropriations and spectrum auction revenues. And there can
1193 be other types of public-private partnerships that are
1194 created to fund this, and make sure that everyone pays in.

1195 You know, our goal isn't to sort of tell you exactly how
1196 you have to do it. Ours is outcome determinative. We want
1197 to make sure that, at the end of this, we have not left
1198 people behind.

1199 We had a briefing about two weeks ago that I think some
1200 of your staff attended, where we talked about infrastructure
1201 priorities for communities of color. And we had people
1202 representing Asian-American communities and Latinx and
1203 African-American. Every single group listed broadband at the
1204 top of their list, and affordability, and addressing digital
1205 readiness, as well as language inclusion at the top. And
1206 that is because we know that, across all of our indicia of
1207 equity, making sure that people have broadband is key and
1208 fundamental.

1209 *The Chairman. Well, thank you. And then my last
1210 question is of Ms. Ochillo.

1211 We know that local government is very invested in making
1212 sure that communities and the constituents have equal access
1213 and opportunity to use high-speed broadband. So why do you
1214 think that digital inclusion efforts have been so successful
1215 at the local level?

1216 And what can we do in Congress to support those efforts,
1217 if you will?

1218 *Ms. Ochillo. Well, they have been supportive -- they
1219 have been successful at the local level because they don't

1220 have another choice. I think that, you know, local officials
1221 are some of the scrappiest people that I have ever met. They
1222 are problem solvers. They run into the grocery store, and to
1223 schools, and they run into their constituents. They have a
1224 different type of accountability and urgency in solving a
1225 problem. So they have to gather whatever resources they have
1226 available, and whatever partnerships they can to actually
1227 make something happen.

1228 At the federal level, we could do a lot more information
1229 sharing, and centralizing that. At the FCC we could ask
1230 questions about improving data to actually know who is
1231 disconnected, and are we sending the money out the door to
1232 the right places, because over and over again money keeps
1233 going to the same people who keep cherrypicking who they get
1234 to serve. And that is not working.

1235 So we can talk in platitudes about everything is going
1236 well, but the truth is that when you go into these
1237 neighborhoods, and you meet them at their town hall meetings,
1238 it is not going well, and they need support.

1239 *The Chairman. Well, thank you so much. I appreciate
1240 the fact that all of you are so practical about what needs to
1241 be done, because that is really the key.

1242 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

1243 *Mr. Doyle. The gentleman yields back. The chair now
1244 recognizes Mrs. McMorris Rodgers, the full committee ranking

1245 member, for five minutes.

1246 *Mrs. Rodgers. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you,
1247 everyone, for joining us today for this important discussion.

1248 Mr. Ford, I wanted just to go back to the Emergency
1249 Broadband Benefit again. That was a benefit that Republicans
1250 and Democrats agreed to put into place in response to the
1251 challenges that Americans were facing as a result of COVID-19
1252 and the pandemic.

1253 You know, one idea that we are considering today is
1254 making that benefit permanent, and appropriating six billion
1255 over the next five years. Several companies currently
1256 voluntarily offer low-income broadband programs such as
1257 Internet Essentials or Connect to Compete for rates around
1258 \$10 per month. And that is not to mention such programs as
1259 lift zones, which connects 16 community centers to Wi-Fi in
1260 the Spokane area alone.

1261 And despite these offerings, there is still too many
1262 Americans who do not adopt broadband. So, Dr. Ford, I just
1263 wanted to ask, what is the main obstacle, in your opinion, to
1264 adoption?

1265 *Dr. Ford. Well, I mean, one of the main obstacles, of
1266 course, is not having access, and we are attempting to
1267 address that. I think the mechanisms in place -- are in
1268 place to do that. More funding may be necessary in certain
1269 areas. The evidence that we have on that is a bit cloudy.

1270 But the number-one reason people say they don't have
1271 broadband is they don't want it.

1272 I think that you also have situations where the
1273 government has funded anchor institutions and various places
1274 where people can get free access, and that is a substitute
1275 for home access.

1276 *Mrs. Rodgers. What about price? Can you just --

1277 *Dr. Ford. Look, the demand curve sloped downward. So
1278 if you lower price, you will increase quantity. The question
1279 is by how much.

1280 I mean, if you view this narrowly as a price issue, you
1281 are going to be disappointed when you come back a couple of
1282 years from now and you see that there is still people who
1283 aren't adopting broadband, and that this price solution
1284 didn't solve the problem.

1285 *Mrs. Rodgers. Have you -- so what are your thoughts on
1286 appropriating six billion, making this program permanent,
1287 the --

1288 *Dr. Ford. I mentioned some things -- okay, sorry.

1289 *Mrs. Rodgers. So what kind of impact --

1290 *Dr. Ford. I mentioned some things --

1291 *Mrs. Rodgers. -- do you think it would have?

1292 *Dr. Ford. I think it will have an impact somewhat like
1293 Lifeline program has. It will have 25, 30 percent of the
1294 people participating. You will have some increase in

1295 adoption, and you will be disappointed --

1296 *Mrs. Rodgers. Okay, thank you.

1297 *Dr. Ford. -- that it didn't cure the whole problem.

1298 *Mrs. Rodgers. Thank you.

1299 In 2015 the FCC expressly declined to impose rate
1300 regulation on broadband providers, saying that doing so was
1301 not necessary and would undermine investment in broadband
1302 networks. Former FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler said, "Let me be
1303 clear. The FCC will not impose utility-style regulation,"
1304 and specified, "That means no regulation, no filing of
1305 tariffs, and no network unbundling."

1306 Mr. Lewis, according to the most recent FCC
1307 Communications Marketplace Report, prices for the most
1308 popular broadband plans have fallen by 20 percent. Since
1309 former Chairman Wheeler made that decision not to rate-
1310 regulate in 2015, at the same time those plans now average 16
1311 percent faster speed. Do you think former Chairman Wheeler
1312 was wrong to refrain from imposing rate regulation on
1313 broadband providers?

1314 *Dr. Ford. No --

1315 *Mr. Lewis. Congresswoman --

1316 *Dr. Ford. I think that would be very bad.

1317 *Mrs. Rodgers. Oh, I -- actually, I was asking Mr.
1318 Lewis this time.

1319 *Dr. Ford. Oh, I am sorry.

1320 *Mrs. Rodgers. Then I will let you go, Mr. Ford.

1321 *Mr. Lewis. Thank you, Congresswoman. I was grateful
1322 that Chairman Wheeler, you know, enacted strong net
1323 neutrality rules. And I think, as a compromise, he did not
1324 enact any sort of rate regulation. But I don't believe that
1325 means that the FCC should not be a cop on the beat when
1326 looking at the broadband marketplace.

1327 And right now, it doesn't have the authority to actually
1328 look at the broadband marketplace and see what people are
1329 actually paying. So, you know, we have had, traditionally in
1330 this country, options for telecom utilities, where either we
1331 have a monopoly system, or we have competition. I am trying
1332 to get us towards competition. But if we have monopoly
1333 pricing, or few choices for consumers in localities like we
1334 are seeing, then that can lead to prices continuing to go up
1335 well ahead of inflation.

1336 *Mrs. Rodgers. Mr. Ford, I will give you the final 20
1337 seconds, if you want to --

1338 *Dr. Ford. Yes, rate regulation would not be helpful.
1339 I mean, you are -- rate regulation is going to affect the 90.
1340 What you are trying to do is address affordability for
1341 certain sorts of people. That is not going to solve that
1342 problem, and that is going to reduce deployment and reduce
1343 upgrades in networks.

1344 *Mrs. Rodgers. Okay, thank you, everyone. I yield

1345 back.

1346 *Mr. Doyle. The gentlelady yields back. The chair now
1347 recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. McNerney, for
1348 five minutes.

1349 *Mr. McNerney. Well, thank you, Chairman Doyle, and I
1350 thank the witnesses for your excellent testimony.

1351 My congressional district includes cities and
1352 communities that have been economically depressed. A few
1353 years ago, as a part of its economic revitalization plan, the
1354 City of Stockton, California set out to build an open access
1355 fiber network. The project was put on hold because financing
1356 wasn't available. But I would like to discuss the benefits
1357 of a project like this would have for communities like
1358 Stockton.

1359 Mr. Lewis, how do open access fiber networks impact
1360 competition in the marketplace?

1361 *Mr. Lewis. So open access networks, Congressman, can
1362 bring in competition by lowering the barriers to building the
1363 core infrastructure of the network, which is the most
1364 expensive part of building out a broadband network, by
1365 getting the partnership of local government or using
1366 subsidies to do it.

1367 And then, when those networks are open, any provider can
1368 use that infrastructure to offer service to the folks that
1369 the network reaches. So this allows multiple providers to

1370 compete on price, and hopefully see lower prices.

1371 *Mr. McNerney. Well, thank you. What is the impact of
1372 open access by the networks on broadband service for
1373 consumers?

1374 *Mr. Lewis. Well, my hope is that it would start with
1375 lower prices, but it can also, hopefully, lead to competition
1376 in other areas of the service. So in responsiveness and
1377 customer service. Once a provider doesn't have a monopoly on
1378 a territory, they really have to compete for the attention
1379 and the loyalty of the consumers there.

1380 *Mr. McNerney. Well, thank you.

1381 Ms. Ochillo, thank you for your advocacy and work on
1382 these issues. How can open access fiber networks make
1383 communities more resilient, or do you have any examples?

1384 *Ms. Ochillo. Well, I think it is always important. I
1385 want to add one more thing to what Chris just mentioned. One
1386 of the great things about open access networks is that, when
1387 the city owns the -- or the area owns the infrastructure, you
1388 get to invest it -- reinvest locally. So that money actually
1389 stays in that local economy, which is something where the
1390 community actually has equity in that project. So there is a
1391 natural incentive to actually always make it something that
1392 is better.

1393 And when you are talking about -- I don't want to get
1394 into specifics about what happened in Stockton, but I think

1395 one of the things that is so ambitious is, when we are
1396 looking at communities where you have large groups of either
1397 low-income people, or also communities where it has suffered
1398 from years and decades of disinvestment, it is so important
1399 that the city actually intervene, and actually provide
1400 affordable service that is actually equivalent to the service
1401 that other people would get.

1402 So not just coming in for -- it is advertised at 25/3,
1403 and it is less than, but actual competitive service that is
1404 something that might be even comparable to 100 symmetrical or
1405 even other speeds that other people would pay for with a
1406 municipal or an open access network.

1407 *Mr. McNerney. Thank you. Well, Ms. Ochillo, in your
1408 written testimony you state that digital equity and inclusion
1409 programs cannot be an afterthought.

1410 *Ms. Ochillo. Yes.

1411 *Mr. McNerney. I completely agree, and that is why I
1412 introduced the Digital Equity Act, which would create two
1413 federal programs to address gaps in broadband adoption and
1414 digital literacy and skills. Can you tell us why digital
1415 equity and inclusion programs are so important, and why they
1416 are something we should be prioritizing?

1417 *Ms. Ochillo. They are an imperative. I think that,
1418 when we look back to even, like, the National Broadband Plan
1419 10 years ago, the FCC actually identified saying, look,

1420 broadband access and adoption, they are both problems. And
1421 then, after that, it was singularly focused on only solving
1422 the broadband deployment problem.

1423 So here we are, years later, when we actually know, not
1424 just because of COVID, but we actually know that there are
1425 large amounts of people who can get the infrastructure in
1426 their neighborhood, or even close to their front door, and we
1427 can't get it across the threshold. So that means that we
1428 need to not only address affordability, we also need to think
1429 about do they have the digital literacy, do they have the
1430 device in their home, do they have access to tech support?

1431 And also, I want to point out this isn't just about the
1432 economics of making sure that that person is trained. It is
1433 making sure that they actually have a digitally literate
1434 household, because that has a generational impact on the
1435 opportunities that everyone that they touch has.

1436 *Mr. McNerney. Thank you. Thank you for that answer.

1437 Ms. Chaney, if we don't rise to the moment and fully
1438 address gaps in broadband adoption and access, what are the
1439 consequences for marginalized communities that already have
1440 been left behind?

1441 *Ms. Chaney. I mean, the fact of the matter is I don't
1442 know of any community who is just saying that they don't want
1443 to have -- that is not -- broadband. That is not the
1444 experience that we had at the National Urban League. Our

1445 experience is that people want to have access, but they
1446 cannot afford it, or there is such a barrier, because they
1447 haven't been able to afford it, and they don't know how to
1448 use it, that they are almost afraid to enter into that space.

1449 But we know that, through your program, as well as
1450 through federal efforts that could focus on having digital
1451 equity inclusion, including the program at the Commerce
1452 Department, we would be able to address those gaps and make
1453 sure that we have digital navigators who are also -- like the
1454 National Urban League, like perhaps some of the other witness
1455 organizations here, to try to close the gap and make sure
1456 people know how they can get online, how they can utilize,
1457 and also making sure that they are able to afford it. We
1458 think it is critical. Without it, you simply -- you can't
1459 compete in the current market.

1460 And on health care post-pandemic, it is exponential, the
1461 amount of telehealth that is being used. So frankly, having
1462 access to broadband is now not only a matter of quality of
1463 life, it is a matter of life and death.

1464 *Mr. Doyle. The gentleman's time has expired. The
1465 chair now recognizes Mr. Guthrie for five minutes.

1466 *Mr. Guthrie. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks for --
1467 everybody, Ranking Member Latta, for having this hearing.
1468 This is -- the witnesses for being here. This is so
1469 important. The digital divide is real, and it must be

1470 addressed, and it must be addressed with equitable solutions.

1471 And I can tell you, I know I have a lot of urban and --
1472 more suburban areas in my district, but also very, very rural
1473 areas. And for areas to grow, they are going to have to have
1474 access to broadband, access to this resource, just to grow
1475 businesses, not to mention the fact that we are now having
1476 people get their health through telecommunicating, and also
1477 through the education with some of our schools not being
1478 fully open here. So it is really important to do.

1479 And some of you, if you have been here long enough to
1480 remember -- most of us haven't, but Ernie Fletcher, who was
1481 the governor of Kentucky in the early 2000s, was a member of
1482 this committee. And he came in, and we did a big effort
1483 fighting over tobacco settlement dollars, and dedicated a lot
1484 of efforts to trying to close the digital divide. There is a
1485 group called Kentucky Wired that spent \$1.5 billion, and they
1486 really focused on the middle mile, not getting the last mile
1487 to our -- to the homes. But 1.5 billion had been spent, and
1488 still not complete.

1489 I will tell you, there are conversations we have in this
1490 subcommittee, or as I meet with different people that have
1491 interests before the subcommittee, on just getting maps. I
1492 mean, as much money as we spent, as much -- as long as we
1493 have been doing this, we are still focusing on maps. So I
1494 kind of direct this to Dr. Ford, and just -- we all want

1495 people to have access to the broadband.

1496 And the question is, the comparison between doing it
1497 through the public sector and incentivizing through --
1498 obviously, it is going to take public dollars to get where
1499 the market doesn't work, and getting it to rural areas. But
1500 incentivizing the private sector to do -- would you kind of
1501 talk about the difference in a government approach versus
1502 incentivizing a private-sector approach, Dr. Ford?

1503 *Dr. Ford. There are a couple of ways that you can
1504 address the problem of revenue not being adequate to cover
1505 costs. One is to try to get the cost down. And there is
1506 some efforts to do that with trying to clean up some barriers
1507 to entry that exist in local government, with respect to pole
1508 attachment fees, or access requirements, and rights of way,
1509 and things of that nature.

1510 And there is also just the subsidy approach, which is to
1511 pay the money to do it, which is pretty much what we do
1512 today.

1513 I think that it is apparent, from an economic
1514 perspective, that paying a network that already exists to
1515 extend its reach at the margin is much more efficient than to
1516 overbill the entire network in order to reach the 5 or 10
1517 percent of the people that don't have it. And a lot of
1518 times, with government programs, municipal broadband, they
1519 overbuild the entire market, giving people something they

1520 already had, for the most part, just to get to the top 10
1521 percent that don't have it. And that is an extremely
1522 inefficient and costly way to go about doing it.

1523 *Mr. Guthrie. So what are your thoughts -- and if
1524 anybody else wants to weigh in -- and I am very interested
1525 on, you know, we are really focused on fixed fiber to home.
1526 And when we have mobile communications that are moving
1527 forward, particularly with 5G networks -- and there is some
1528 question about the superiority of one over the other, or if
1529 they are equal. And so can you use 5G mobile networks to get
1530 broadband where it needs to be, or does it have to be fixed
1531 fiber to home?

1532 And if the 5G does work, we are at a point where we were
1533 -- felt like we were falling behind, or could fall behind --
1534 I don't think we are, but we certainly could fall behind
1535 China and other areas in 5G, and we need to focus on it. And
1536 we are spending a lot of money. We are spending a lot of
1537 money getting -- it is not a lack of the American people,
1538 taxpayers, putting resources to broadband, if you just look
1539 at the last few plans that have been passed.

1540 So the question -- I will start with Dr. Ford, but
1541 anybody else that wants to add in, would 5G, and really
1542 investing in 5G and making mobile networks a better way to go
1543 than fixed fiber to home, or an equal way to go?

1544 *Dr. Ford. I worry a little bit that 10 years from now

1545 we are going to be kicking ourselves for deploying all this
1546 fiber, when half the people use mobile networks exclusively.

1547 I think mobility is a superior product, in the sense
1548 that it is mobile. It may not be superior in its capacity at
1549 the moment, but 5G offers the opportunity for --

1550 *Mr. Guthrie. I have about 30 seconds left, if one of
1551 the other witnesses wants to add in. If not, I will go back.

1552 Yes, Mr. Lewis, I know -- I will get the gavel in 20
1553 seconds, so --

1554 *Mr. Lewis. Congressman, it is important to remember
1555 that 5G and fiber are -- it is not a choice between one or
1556 the other. You can't have quality mobile networks, including
1557 5G, without quality infrastructure for those 5G towers to
1558 connect to.

1559 *Mr. Guthrie. Oh, absolutely.

1560 *Mr. Lewis. And right now they have to connect almost
1561 every couple of miles, or mile-and-a-half is the best --

1562 *Mr. Guthrie. We are talking fiber to home, though.
1563 That is the difference of fiber to home versus --

1564 *Mr. Doyle. The gentleman's time has expired.

1565 *Mr. Guthrie. I am sorry, thanks. Thank you, I yield
1566 back.

1567 *Mr. Doyle. I thank the gentleman. The chair now
1568 recognizes the gentlewoman from New York, Ms. Clarke, for
1569 five minutes.

1570 *Ms. Clarke. Chairman Doyle and Ranking Member Latta, I
1571 want to thank you for convening today's hearing. The topic
1572 of broadband equity is an urgent concern, and I would also
1573 like to thank our witnesses for virtually joining the
1574 committee and sharing your testimonies.

1575 Broadband is an essential utility, and consumers,
1576 regardless of income, race, ethnicity, color, or national
1577 origin, deserve affordable, reliable broadband.

1578 Communities of color are more likely to have slower and
1579 less reliable Internet service. This disparity creates
1580 significant barriers to accessing employment opportunities,
1581 educational opportunities, health care resources, and
1582 diminishes opportunities for civic engagement. The
1583 compounded issues of availability and affordability are
1584 having a disproportionate impact on communities that have
1585 been victims of housing redlining from previous generations,
1586 and this can also be seen in our digital world.

1587 As the Electronic Frontier Foundation outlined in their
1588 recent letter to Chairman Doyle and Ranking Member Latta,
1589 "Digital redlining is the formation of a first and second-
1590 class broadband infrastructure, where wealthy communities
1591 easily access 21st-century opportunities, with low-cost, fast
1592 Internet, while everyone else is left behind.''

1593 Mr. Chairman, I would like to enter the letter into the
1594 record.

1595 Congress must take --

1596 *Mr. Doyle. So ordered.

1597 [The information follows:]

1598

1599 *****COMMITTEE INSERT*****

1600

1601 *Ms. Clarke. Congress must take urgent action to
1602 prohibit the discriminatory deployment of broadband by
1603 Internet service providers based on income level of an area,
1604 the predominant race or ethnicity composition of an area, or
1605 other focus. And I will continue to prioritize the critical
1606 issue of digital redlining, and will commit to working with
1607 my colleagues to draft legislation to address it.

1608 You know, the COVID-19 pandemic has only underscored the
1609 fact, with rapid adoption of the virtual space, that high-
1610 speed, affordable broadband is a critical resource. It is a
1611 necessity, and not a luxury, and it is our job, as Congress,
1612 to remove the barriers to equitable access.

1613 So, Mr. Lewis, I would like to ask you. Your testimony
1614 outlines the many ways in which broadband has proven to be an
1615 essential utility, like water and electricity. We are proud
1616 of the inclusion of the Internet as a utility in the CARES
1617 Act, and the FCC's recently-launched EBB program. However,
1618 these are temporary solutions as the American people continue
1619 to recover from the coronavirus pandemic. How can the
1620 federal government establish a long-term policy for ensuring
1621 equity access to affordable and high-speed broadband?

1622 *Mr. Lewis. Well, we need to learn from the past, as we
1623 did with telecommunications for the phone. You need to have
1624 a long-term benefit for low-income consumers to have supports
1625 to be able to afford broadband. Hopefully, that will meet

1626 the price that is coming from the industry. But we also need
1627 to study those prices to make sure that those prices are
1628 competitive, and not monopoly prices.

1629 *Ms. Clarke. Very well. Ms. Ochillo, in your testimony
1630 you discuss the economic disadvantages impacting underserved
1631 and unserved communities, both urban and rural. Can you
1632 please elaborate on this, and the broader negative impact
1633 that inequitable broadband access has on our national
1634 economy?

1635 *Ms. Ochillo. Well, I think that, in general, there is
1636 this idea that when people say, "digital redlining," they
1637 automatically assume you are talking about an urban area.
1638 And we actually talk to municipalities on a weekly basis. We
1639 have done so since April of 2020. We have talked to a new
1640 municipality. And what we find out is that that comes up in
1641 midsized and rural cities, just as often, if not more so.

1642 What we know is that the places that have widespread
1643 access, they are the places that are able to attract
1644 innovation. They can maintain their population. They could
1645 actually allow residents to age in place. They have so many
1646 more benefits and advantages than the places where broadband
1647 is either unreliable or simply unaffordable.

1648 And it would actually help if the federal government, in
1649 terms of not only information sharing, thinking about all of
1650 the agencies that are getting involved in broadband, whether

1651 it is the NTIA, USDA, and all sorts of agencies, there should
1652 be some sort of centralized information sharing and,
1653 actually, building off of the things that we have learned
1654 from COVID, because we know that people have, essentially,
1655 had to come up with all sorts of creative solutions. And it
1656 would actually help us to actually use those things to inform
1657 whatever is the strategy, moving forward.

1658 *Ms. Clarke. Well, thank you very much.

1659 Mr. Chairman, I have got 13 seconds and I am going to
1660 yield them back.

1661 *Mr. Doyle. I thank the gentlelady for that. The chair
1662 now recognizes my good friend from Florida, and fellow
1663 Pittsburgh Pirate fan, Mr. Bilirakis.

1664 You are recognized for five minutes.

1665 [Pause.]

1666 *Mr. Doyle. Gus, you need to unmute.

1667 *Mr. Bilirakis. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I
1668 apologize. I had a hard time finding the mute button. My
1669 vision is not the best.

1670 Okay, well, I have a couple of questions, and I
1671 appreciate you all being here today, and testifying.

1672 Mr. Ford, I have heard proposals to change the minimum
1673 broadband speed requirements from 25 down/3 up to a
1674 symmetrical or symmetric service of upwards of 100. Under
1675 the current standard, my district is largely served, except

1676 for a portion that I will address shortly. But under
1677 100/100, there would actually be large unserved areas around
1678 the Tampa Bay area, the 18th largest metropolitan area in the
1679 country.

1680 Are symmetrical speeds consistent with how consumers
1681 have used broadband service?

1682 Is this a realistic expected future consumer usage rate?

1683 And that question is for Mr. Ford, please.

1684 *Dr. Ford. No, that is not the way broadband is
1685 consumed. And I don't think the 100/100 proposal has
1686 anything to do with trying to match the way people consume
1687 broadband. It is motivated by other reasons.

1688 *Mr. Bilirakis. What is it motivated for, can you
1689 expand on that a little bit?

1690 *Dr. Ford. It is basically motivated because that is
1691 what fiber networks are generally designed to do, although
1692 they don't have to. They often do because they have so much
1693 excess bandwidth, so they offer symmetric circuits. So if
1694 you require a -- if you have a broadband definition of
1695 symmetry, particularly at 100/100 or more, a gig, symmetric
1696 gig, which some people have proposed, then you are basically
1697 saying the only broadband is fiber broadband.

1698 *Mr. Bilirakis. Okay, thank you. Another question for
1699 Mr. Ford.

1700 The pandemic has demonstrated how important the Internet

1701 is for seniors and our disabled residents to stay in touch
1702 with loved ones, and take advantage of telehealth services.
1703 But these groups in rural areas may not have access to
1704 broadband. In some cases they don't.

1705 Additionally, I represent the small community of
1706 Ladoochee, whose residents have been begging for Internet
1707 access for years, especially after local children had to
1708 access Internet on buses deployed around East Pasco, East
1709 Pasco County, to connect with teachers for distance learning,
1710 even in our great country.

1711 Mr. Ford, how does it help our seniors, our kids, and
1712 the disabled community in rural areas catch up on Internet
1713 connectivity by increasing minimum standards?

1714 If you can, elaborate on that. I know you touched on
1715 it. That would be good. It seems to me that the people who
1716 were next in line under our current coverage standards will
1717 now be pushed to the back of the line yet again. Is that
1718 true, what do you think?

1719 *Dr. Ford. I mean, there is certainly the risk of that.
1720 If you -- if the funding of broadband in underserved areas is
1721 linked directly to a symmetric 100-megabit circuit, then you
1722 are going to have a higher-cost network, and they are going
1723 to be less likely to get it. So you could actually see it
1724 backfire against the present goal of expanding availability
1725 and -- by giving a service that, really, nobody would use.

1726 If you gave them a 100-megabit circuit, they are only going
1727 to use 5 percent of that, probably, at max. So it pushes you
1728 into a technological solution that may be more expensive than
1729 other solutions that would solve your problem.

1730 *Mr. Bilirakis. Well, thank you very much.

1731 In closing, Mr. Chairman, let us not forget the work
1732 that the providers did for our communities during the height
1733 of this pandemic, keeping -- and they are still doing it --
1734 keeping people connected, even if constituents found
1735 themselves without the ability to pay for services. They
1736 have gone above and beyond, as partners, as we transition to
1737 the remote world. And their important concerns should
1738 continue to be valued today, and I know they are.

1739 I want to put a plug in, because I have a couple of
1740 seconds, for Withlacoochee Electric. It is a nonprofit, and
1741 Withlacoochee has transformed this wonderful town of
1742 Lacoochee. And Lacoochee is famous for many famous athletes,
1743 and what a difference it has made when a little love is
1744 spread into a community. But we have got to get broadband
1745 for those good people.

1746 Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I yield back, and
1747 beat them, Bucs.

1748 *Mr. Doyle. Thank you, Gus. The chair now recognizes
1749 Mr. McEachin for five minutes.

1750 *Mr. McEachin. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you

1751 also for convening today's hearing. And to our witnesses,
1752 thank you for joining us.

1753 Reliable, affordable, high-speed broadband services in
1754 today's economy and the economy of the future is really the
1755 fourth utility. Not unlike water, gas, and electricity,
1756 communities who do not have fast, reliable, and affordable
1757 Internet services will be left behind, and the pandemic has
1758 only underscored that fact.

1759 Ms. Ochillo, thank you for being here today. In your
1760 testimony you make the point that sound broadband policy
1761 starts with better maps. I could not agree more. Making
1762 sure we are allocating resources based on accurate maps has
1763 been something I have been passionate about since I was
1764 appointed to this subcommittee.

1765 Well, I was heartened that we passed legislation and
1766 funding last Congress that intended to fix some of the issues
1767 we have seen in the past. However, I worry that some of
1768 these issues we saw previously will persist if not addressed
1769 now.

1770 In your opinion, what can we do to make sure our maps
1771 accurately reflect where providers serve, and what lessons
1772 have we learned from previous auctions?

1773 *Ms. Ochillo. So I want to say, first, thank you for
1774 the question. I want to make sure that I am really brief.

1775 Number one, we couldn't agree more. We are working on

1776 studying maps across the United States. And what we learned
1777 when we looked at every single -- all 50 states and
1778 territories, we learned there was a contradiction in every
1779 single one of them between FCC data and the information that
1780 was collected either from their state or local officials.

1781 What we know is that, when we start out with the poison
1782 of bad data, it ends up having this really insidious effect
1783 that touches everything. And so I want to give you an
1784 example that actually exists in Virginia that we found in our
1785 research. We looked up Virginia back in -- earlier, in March
1786 2021. Basically, they had -- it was House bill, I think,
1787 1800, and it essentially said -- it was a legislative
1788 proposal that prohibits broadband providers from having to
1789 submit any additional information that was required -- than
1790 what was required by the FCC.

1791 And even after that, the agency that was managing the
1792 data would only be able to publish anonymized information.

1793 The problem is that, even when the FCC's data is bad
1794 data, as the poisonous pot, when a state gets -- comes in and
1795 says, "Hey, can we make that data better," it is now curbing
1796 efforts at the state. And then, when you get to the local
1797 level, you find out, if you were mark as served, unserved, or
1798 underserved, all of those things, that stain stays with you.
1799 It can either close off opportunities for funding. It might
1800 change what you are eligible for.

1801 And so, when we are sending billions of dollars out the
1802 door and, you know, even thinking about the auction, it is
1803 like we are sending billions of dollars out the door, and we
1804 can't even identify whether unserved or underserved is the
1805 accurate marker for the places that are going to be applying
1806 for funding.

1807 So we think it is a problem that needs to be addressed
1808 immediately.

1809 *Mr. McEachin. Thank you for that.

1810 Mr. Lewis, it is good to see you again, my friend. What
1811 can we do to make sure that low-income communities and
1812 underserved communities actually get the broadband services
1813 that they need?

1814 *Mr. Lewis. Thank you, Congressman. And it is good to
1815 see you, as well.

1816 Number one, we need to have a long-term benefit for low-
1817 income consumers.

1818 Number two, we need to do everything we can to promote
1819 competition in the marketplace.

1820 And number three, we need to remember that the cost to
1821 consumers is not just the cost of the service. So consumers
1822 are also paying a tremendous amount of money in fees on their
1823 broadband lines right now, hidden fees, below-the-line fees.
1824 They are paying for rentals of modems and other devices. And
1825 then there is the cost of the actual device that they use,

1826 the computer or the laptop that, you know, when you have a
1827 family of four -- these days, everyone is online at the same
1828 time -- requires multiple devices.

1829 *Mr. McEachin. Well, thank you for that. You know,
1830 when it comes to those hidden fees and what not, do you have
1831 a suggestion on how we should deal with those?

1832 *Mr. Lewis. I think it starts with transparency. You
1833 know, I think Ms. Eshoo and others have worked for years to
1834 mandate a level of transparency around below-the-line fees,
1835 and we support that. But we need to have truth in billing
1836 and accuracy in the fees that are charged, and why they are
1837 being charged, so that people get the actual prices, not just
1838 an advertised price with fees added on to it later on.

1839 *Mr. McEachin. Thank you, sir.

1840 Mr. Chairman, I have 24 seconds left, and I will say, go
1841 Orioles. I yield back.

1842 *Mr. Doyle. I thank the gentleman very much. The chair
1843 now recognizes my friend from the great State of Ohio.

1844 Mr. Johnson, you are recognized for five minutes.

1845 *Mr. Johnson. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know,
1846 the lack of broadband in rural America is not a new problem.
1847 It is something that we have talked about for decades. And
1848 while I acknowledge that affordability may play a factor in
1849 the availability of broadband for some in urban and rural
1850 locations, the lack of infrastructure and accessibility in

1851 rural America in many places that I represent means that
1852 broadband simply is not an option, period. You can't pay for
1853 a service that doesn't exist, even if you have got the money.

1854 However, I am appreciative of the efforts of many ISPs
1855 to work with consumers and provide low-cost options to
1856 increase broadband affordability in areas where broadband is
1857 available, where cost is the true barrier to adoption.
1858 Particularly during the COVID pandemic, many providers
1859 pledged, as we all know, to connect as many Americans as
1860 possible, and did so without a government mandate.

1861 So, Dr. Ford, we all want to close the urban/rural
1862 digital divide, while fostering a healthy environment for
1863 competition and innovation. However, there are efforts by
1864 the Biden Administration to have the federal government
1865 regulate consumer broadband prices. We are also seeing
1866 various initiatives at the state level to do this, as well.
1867 So do you think these rate regulation efforts will
1868 effectively close the digital divide in America?

1869 *Dr. Ford. It certainly won't close the urban/rural
1870 divide, which you mentioned. It won't close it, it will --
1871 there is going to be two effects. One is people may buy more
1872 at a lower price, and the other is suppliers may supply less
1873 because of lower price. And so these two things are going to
1874 work against each other.

1875 *Mr. Johnson. What do you think is a better alternative

1876 to federal price regulating?

1877 *Dr. Ford. Well, I think you need to focus on the
1878 problem that you are trying to solve. And in your case you
1879 are talking about getting broadband deployed where it is not.
1880 That is not a rate regulation matter. That is a reduce-the-
1881 cost-of-deployment matter. That is a subsidize-the-spread-
1882 between-costs-and-revenues matter, which is how you are going
1883 to get that problem solved.

1884 *Mr. Johnson. Okay.

1885 *Dr. Ford. It is not this other stuff. Net neutrality
1886 isn't needed for that, or any other regulations needed for
1887 that.

1888 *Mr. Johnson. Got it.

1889 *Dr. Ford. You just subsidize the deployment.

1890 *Mr. Johnson. Yes. Let me go to another question. We
1891 know that U.S. broadband innovation has flourished under a
1892 light-touch regulatory framework. In the immediate period
1893 following the 2015 title 2 open Internet order, which
1894 threatened companies with burdensome public utility rules,
1895 including rate regulation, we saw a significant decline in
1896 broadband investment. Yet after our return to the light-
1897 touch regulatory framework under Chairman Pai's leadership at
1898 the FCC, U.S. broadband companies increased their investment.
1899 Now they are investing more than three times as much in
1900 broadband infrastructure per household as their tightly-

1901 regulated European counterparts.

1902 So do you think, Dr. Ford, that rate regulation is
1903 necessary to keep broadband prices low?

1904 *Dr. Ford. Well, I think rate regulation can make price
1905 whatever they want to, but you have to suffer the
1906 consequences of it.

1907 I think that, when you have got the vast majority of
1908 Americans buying broadband, it is kind of hard to make the
1909 argument that the price is too high, and you have got
1910 affordability plans by almost every carrier. These things
1911 are extremely expensive to build, these networks. And, as
1912 you mentioned, we invest far more than Europeans do. And
1913 that is a reflection of cost --

1914 *Mr. Johnson. Yes.

1915 *Dr. Ford. -- of providing the service. So those costs
1916 have to be recovered if you want network.

1917 *Mr. Johnson. Yes. You know, some of my Democrat
1918 colleagues are proposing to increase the definition of
1919 broadband to 100 megabits, 100 megabit symmetrical service
1920 upload download, drastically increasing the areas considered
1921 unserved and eligible for federal funding. I am concerned
1922 that this will mean funding will most likely be used to
1923 upgrade places that already have broadband, while truly
1924 unserved rural customers continue to wait at the back of the
1925 line.

1926 It also mandates a certain technology that can provide
1927 those symmetrical speeds.

1928 So, Dr. Ford, should these unserved areas be forced to
1929 wait until fiber technology can be built 6 to 10 years from
1930 now, or should we fund technologies that can provide service
1931 as soon as possible to unserved areas?

1932 *Dr. Ford. They need to have -- if broadband is really
1933 important, they need to get broadband as soon as possible at
1934 a speed that satisfies the need. And 25/3 satisfies almost
1935 any socially-valuable need.

1936 *Mr. Johnson. Yes, I -- well, I have a comment on that,
1937 but my time has expired. And out of respect for my chairman,
1938 I will forego that.

1939 Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

1940 *Mr. Doyle. I thank the gentleman very much. Let's
1941 see.

1942 Next, Mr. O'Halleran, you are recognized for five
1943 minutes.

1944 *Mr. O'Halleran. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking
1945 Member, for this meeting today. I want to thank the panel
1946 for a great discussion.

1947 Broadband access is a problem in both Democratic and
1948 Republican districts, and the --

1949 [Audio malfunction.]

1950 *Mr. O'Halleran. The fact is that access to broadband

1951 in America's rural communities is downright terrible. It is
1952 not even close to being where it needs to be.

1953 In Arizona, only 66 percent of the population has access
1954 to broadband at the FCC's minimum speed standard. And that
1955 is not competitive with the rest of America. In Apache
1956 County, the download is 2.28, and this is a Google speed
1957 test. And the upload is .80. The Navajo County, 6.71
1958 download, 1.83 upload. In Greenwood County, 9.68 download,
1959 and 2.75 upload. And that is where they have it. And again,
1960 everybody on this panel knows that the -- where it is
1961 accessible is not even near to be able to be afforded, or get
1962 into your home in these areas, the census areas. This is
1963 especially true in tribal communities, where broadband
1964 deployment lags behind in nine tribal areas.

1965 High-speed Internet access is required to participate in
1966 our 21st-century economy, as well to ensure that our children
1967 receive a high-quality education, and not to mention
1968 telemedicine and other health areas. Businesses need high-
1969 speed broadband to compete. Workers need it to do their
1970 jobs. Children need it to do their homework. The lack of
1971 broadband results in poor health and educational outcomes for
1972 those who live in rural and tribal communities.

1973 We must make a real investment to bring every community
1974 online. Our top priority must be to reach every home in
1975 America. Everyone must be able to get online, regardless of

1976 where they live. This will require flexibility in how we
1977 expand access to every neighborhood.

1978 What works in cities might not work in most remote
1979 areas. We can't have a system where the best technology is
1980 only available in major cities and suburbs. Rural America
1981 needs to catch up. Our children in those areas need to be
1982 able to compete in the worldwide economy, and so do the
1983 businesses in those areas.

1984 My first question is to Ms. Ochillo.

1985 I am concerned that, if we all fall short, or if we fall
1986 short of our goal in connecting every household with
1987 broadband, the communities that will be left out will be the
1988 rural and tribal areas of my district and other districts
1989 like it. How can Congress work with local governments in
1990 rural areas to make sure 100 percent of households get
1991 online?

1992 *Ms. Ochillo. Well, I think it is important -- thank
1993 you for the question, Congressman. I think one thing that is
1994 important is to actually make sure that we are tapping in to
1995 the actual data collection and information that has been
1996 collected, especially in the last year because of COVID.

1997 Essentially, municipalities have had to set up their own
1998 information tracking. So they are not only finding out about
1999 access, they are also finding out about adoption. And we
2000 need to make sure that we are able to send that information

2001 back up, because usually we are relying on FCC information
2002 and trickling it down. We need to make sure that that is
2003 actually stored somewhere, and usable.

2004 When we also think about things that are happening on
2005 the ground, there are really cool partnerships that are
2006 happening in places like Mesa and other places that, quite
2007 frankly, when we actually find out what are the things that
2008 are working, we can find ways to actually share it with other
2009 people within even counties. So local officials can actually
2010 learn from local officials to replicate those success stories
2011 in other places.

2012 *Mr. O'Halleran. So I have a comment here. You know, I
2013 have been listening, and what I have heard is we are trying
2014 to make excuses why we shouldn't do something, and to --
2015 instead of finding ways that we can do something. And we
2016 need to start thinking in that direction. I know, if we were
2017 a business, that is what exactly we would be doing.

2018 Mr. Lewis, there are some rural areas in my district
2019 where building out broadband will be very difficult, and we
2020 may have to consider options other than fiber optics to get
2021 it done. Do you think we should prioritize speed or access?

2022 And do you think there is a tradeoff between the two?

2023 *Mr. Lewis. Well, certainly, as technology develops, we
2024 hope there will be more and more options for making sure that
2025 we get the quality and the speed to everyone.

2026 But I think it is important that, as a country, when we
2027 are setting policy, that we are setting a standard that is --
2028 in urban, rural, tribal areas, that everyone has the same
2029 standard for the quality of broadband, the speed of broadband
2030 that they can get. And hopefully, over time, that will be
2031 able to be provided by multiple different types of
2032 technology.

2033 *Mr. Doyle. The gentleman's time has expired.

2034 *Mr. O'Halleran. Thank you, I yield.

2035 *Mr. Doyle. Okay, the chair now recognizes Missouri's
2036 favorite congressman, Billy Long, for five minutes.

2037 *Mr. Long. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that.

2038 And Dr. Ford, I am -- as we have this discussion here
2039 today, I am reminded of the king that sent out one of his
2040 servants, and he wanted him to come back and research all the
2041 history of the world, all the knowledge of the world, he
2042 wanted every bit of knowledge he could gather. So the guy
2043 goes off, comes back in a year, he has got eight volumes.
2044 The king said that was way, way, way too much. Get it down
2045 to one volume.

2046 So he comes back another year, and he has got all the
2047 information, knowledge of the world, in one volume. Way,
2048 way, way too much. Come back with one chapter.

2049 So he does that, the same thing, comes back with eight
2050 paragraphs. Finally -- says, "That is way too much. I want

2051 all the knowledge of the world, but I want it condensed.'

2052 And he finally, coming back after another year, and he
2053 said, "There is no free lunches.'" And that is kind of what
2054 my question or direction is going to go today, since we know
2055 there are no free lunches.

2056 When I hear talk about the government regulating
2057 broadband prices, I wonder what the cost is going to be. As
2058 an economist, could you discuss how this country has
2059 benefitted from choosing not to heavily regulate broadband,
2060 and what you predict the impact would be if we decided to
2061 regulate rates?

2062 *Dr. Ford. Yes. Giving private providers the
2063 flexibility to meet the needs of their customers and try to
2064 obtain customers is very important to the development of the
2065 market. It encourages the private providers to invest in the
2066 network and to upgrade their networks.

2067 When you constrain the firm, with respect to its prices,
2068 then it has to try to do that in some other way. And that
2069 other way may not be desirable. If you constrain its price,
2070 it may reduce quality, it may stop upgrades, it may reduce
2071 where it goes. I mean, there are consequences. It is not
2072 that you can just change price and nothing happens. There is
2073 a response. Firms are not passive recipients of regulation,
2074 and that would be my one sentence, if somebody asked for the
2075 volume of the history of regulation. Firms respond to what

2076 you do to them, often in ways that you don't expect, and
2077 often in ways you don't like.

2078 But I don't think that the problems that we are talking
2079 about today are going to be addressed or solved by rate
2080 regulation. They are going to be addressed and solved by
2081 very targeted policies to deploying broadband in rural areas,
2082 and dealing with the affordability problem for people who
2083 face it.

2084 *Mr. Long. Are you -- staying with you here, Dr. Ford
2085 -- are you concerned about all the federal broadband money
2086 crowding out private investment?

2087 And what impact is this having on the incentive for
2088 private investment and the speed of deployment?

2089 *Dr. Ford. When you -- well, it comes in many ways, but
2090 yes. I mean, if there is money there, why not wait for it,
2091 or why not just take it?

2092 If you continue to invest in areas that are already
2093 built, what you are going to see is the withdrawal of
2094 investment from those areas. It is very hard to compete with
2095 a subsidized competitor, particularly when they are your
2096 regulator, like the government. So, you know, there is going
2097 to be that response, and I think it could be detrimental.

2098 I do think that, if we design very good policies, we can
2099 avoid a lot of that. But about ham-handedness and getting a
2100 little too excited about it can be detrimental.

2101 *Mr. Long. Isn't it true that the combination of
2102 increasing broadband speeds and falling prices means that
2103 residential broadband prices have dramatically declined on a
2104 megabit-per-second basis?

2105 *Dr. Ford. On a megabit-per-second basis the prices are
2106 way down, yes.

2107 *Mr. Long. Yes, that is what I thought. And the COVID-
2108 19 pandemic presented extraordinary circumstances for all
2109 Americans. As a response, Congress enacted temporary
2110 programs to provide relief to struggling families, including
2111 \$3.2 billion in funding from the FCC's the Emergency
2112 Broadband Benefit program, which just started accepting
2113 applications.

2114 Now that our economy is finally starting to reopen, does
2115 it make sense to make the federal Emergency Broadband Benefit
2116 program permanent?

2117 And shouldn't we study the effectiveness of those
2118 subsidies before we make them permanent?

2119 *Dr. Ford. I mean, I think there may be more cost-
2120 effective ways to make broadband affordable for people who
2121 really need it than that program was. I mean, that was,
2122 obviously, rushed in a very panicked time.

2123 I think there are better ways to do it, and I think
2124 there -- we could set up good incentives for firms to compete
2125 for those customers, and that those customers are able to get

2126 affordable, if not free, services that satisfy their needs.

2127 *Mr. Long. Okay, thank you.

2128 And, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

2129 *Mr. Doyle. I thank the gentleman. The chairman now
2130 recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

2131 Mr. Soto, you are recognized for five minutes.

2132 *Mr. Soto. Thank you, Chairman, for the opportunity.

2133 America has been here before. There was a time as late
2134 as the 1940s, where so many families in rural America had no
2135 electricity. And a young Member of Congress campaigning for
2136 Senate named Lyndon Johnson promised farm families that
2137 electric cooperatives could help them in their reliance --
2138 get them off of oil lamps and wood-burning stoves. And
2139 America got it done.

2140 Can we imagine living in places without electricity
2141 across America? That would be unspeakable. This is the
2142 challenge of the 21st century: providing Internet access to
2143 all Americans. Because it is just as essential.

2144 I was looking at the statistics and the staff analysis:
2145 20 percent of Anglos have no access to home broadband; 29
2146 percent of African-Americans have no access; 35 percent of my
2147 fellow Hispanic families have no access to broadband.
2148 Whether it is broadband, or whether it is other Internet
2149 options to get us to those last miles, to those isolated
2150 rural areas, such as Native American tribal lands, we need to

2151 get it done. That is the charge of this committee. That is
2152 the charge of this Congress.

2153 And then, when we see studies like the Deutsche Bank
2154 study finding that Blacks and Hispanics are 10 years behind
2155 Anglos with regard to Internet access, it is an equity issue.

2156 Then, when you look at the number of students, 15 to 16
2157 million lack Internet access. That became exacerbated by
2158 COVID-19, and kids not being able to distance learn.

2159 I think about areas like South Osceola County and rural
2160 Polk County, where we have communities of Anglos, Hispanics,
2161 African-Americans, many of whom are living without adequate
2162 access to Internet, like a small Hispanic business that wants
2163 to do -- have a website that works, and be able to take
2164 clients and customers online, but their Internet is too slow.
2165 An African-American student in a small city that couldn't
2166 distance learn over the pandemic because he or she didn't
2167 have Internet access. Or the Anglo farmer in my district and
2168 -- with a cattle ranch or with a citrus grove that wants to
2169 use advanced sensors and Wi-Fi for precision agriculture. It
2170 is out of reach for these constituents and others. And as I
2171 mentioned, COVID has only exacerbated these disparities.

2172 So my first question is for Ms. Chaney.

2173 Do you think that the American Jobs Plan and the goals
2174 of this committee to boost Internet access through those
2175 plans will make a big difference to getting Internet access

2176 to all Americans?

2177 *Ms. Chaney. I think it will make a huge difference, so
2178 long as it doesn't just solve for deployment, as long as it
2179 also solves for affordability.

2180 Congressman, I am from Florida, it is good to see you.
2181 Let me just say that, in addition to the examples that you
2182 gave, I would like to give some examples around women. I
2183 come from the women's economic security space. We know what
2184 this pandemic has done to women's employment. We know that
2185 when women make more money, right, there is a lower wage gap
2186 when women have flexibility in the workplace.

2187 Having broadband in the home allows for flexibility. It
2188 allows them to meet caregiving responsibilities. It allows
2189 men to meet caregiving responsibilities and be able to work.
2190 It allows them to work at night, pull an all-nighter. It
2191 allows children to be able to pull an all-nighter, to be
2192 excellent. And when they can take jobs that allow for
2193 flexibility, they can usually earn more money. This is a
2194 critical piece for us to address.

2195 *Mr. Soto. Absolutely, and I agree.

2196 Mr. Lewis, we have heard a lot said today about how we
2197 don't have enough info to act to increase Internet access in
2198 rural areas and communities of color. Do we have enough
2199 information to get started on this?

2200 *Mr. Lewis. Congressman, absolutely, we do. We have

2201 years -- over a decade of efforts by policymakers and
2202 industry, saying they were going to close the digital divide.
2203 And in that amount of time, millions and billions of dollars
2204 have been given to industry, and they still pick and choose
2205 who gets infrastructure built up to them.

2206 We have to put some rules -- build out requirements and
2207 rules around anti-redlining into effect to make sure that,
2208 when you serve a service area, whether it is in an urban
2209 community, a rural community, a tribal community, that you
2210 serve everyone in that area.

2211 *Mr. Soto. Thank you so much.

2212 Ms. Ochillo, we saw in the CARES Act supplemental -- we
2213 passed the first Internet assistance program. Our staff
2214 analysis says we could greatly expand access if families in
2215 need could pay 10 to \$15 a month. Is this a key part of the
2216 solution?

2217 *Ms. Ochillo. Very much so. We have to be able to
2218 provide affordable service options.

2219 And also, we acknowledge that there are going to be
2220 families that aren't even going to be able to afford the 10
2221 or \$15. Either way, that is something that we have to
2222 commit. If we are serious about making sure that broadband
2223 gets to every single household, that means that we are going
2224 to have to serve the people near, the people far, the people
2225 who can afford it, and the people who can't.

2226 *Mr. Doyle. The gentleman's time has expired. The
2227 chair now recognizes Mr. Walberg.

2228 You are recognized for five minutes.

2229 *Mr. Walberg. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate
2230 that. I appreciate this hearing, and all of the panel
2231 members that are with us.

2232 I would like to point out an important distinction
2233 between underserved households and unserved households. I
2234 think we discussed that, but I just want to punctuate the
2235 point. Families in most urban areas can find at least one
2236 option, albeit maybe not an ideal option in terms of cost or
2237 speed, but at least there is something to build off of.

2238 Most folks where I am seated right now and parked in my
2239 district, not very far, just a -- really, a few miles from
2240 where my good friend and colleague Debbie Dingell's district
2241 is, don't have a choice of even a single provider, let alone
2242 a high-cost option. During my socially-distanced live town
2243 hall meeting a few days ago in Bedford Township, one
2244 constituent told me the waiting list to check out a MiFi from
2245 the local library was four months. That is not satisfactory.

2246 At this moment, when digitization of our economy is
2247 advancing so rapidly, our immediate focus should not be on
2248 unsubscribed households, but more so on unserved households,
2249 which data tells us are overwhelmingly in rural and tribal
2250 communities. For these folks, the number-one barrier to

2251 broadband adoption isn't price, but lack of access in the
2252 first place. That is because Americans can't adopt broadband
2253 in areas where broadband hasn't been deployed.

2254 Now our Democrat colleagues in Congress and the
2255 Administration have introduced plans to expand broadband
2256 deployment, but most of their proposals, including the Lift
2257 Act and the Biden-Harris Administration's infrastructure
2258 plan, focus on upgrading technology in areas that are already
2259 served, and overbuilding existing high-speed networks, rather
2260 than connecting areas without any service at all.

2261 In contrast --

2262 [Audio malfunction.]

2263 *Mr. Walberg. -- for deployment we have to discuss
2264 this.

2265 Mr. Ford, how would proposals that focus on future-proof
2266 networks and --

2267 [Audio malfunction.]

2268 *Mr. Doyle. Tim, we are not able to hear you. Your
2269 audio has cut off.

2270 [Pause.]

2271 *Voice. Bad broadband.

2272 *Mr. Walberg. Can you hear me now?

2273 *Mr. Doyle. Yes, I think you are in one of those
2274 underserved areas.

2275 *Mr. Walberg. Yes, it is a perfect example, isn't it,

2276 Mr. Chairman?

2277 [Laughter.]

2278 *Mr. Walberg. I am sorry about that.

2279 *Mr. Doyle. Okay.

2280 *Mr. Walberg. But you can hear me now?

2281 *Mr. Doyle. Yes, yes, we can. Yes, we can.

2282 [Pause.]

2283 *Voice. No.

2284 *Mr. Doyle. Well, no, we can't now, Tim.

2285 [Pause.]

2286 *Mr. Walberg. If you can hear me, I just made my case.

2287 *Mr. Doyle. Well --

2288 *Mr. Walberg. I yield. I yield back. I yield back.

2289 *Mr. Doyle. Okay, the gentleman yields back, and we are
2290 going to have to get some service out your way right away,
2291 Tim. I am glad to see your car wasn't moving. But we will
2292 get -- try to get back to you, if we have some time, because
2293 you were cut short.

2294 Okay, let's see. Miss Rice, you are next. You are
2295 recognized for five minutes.

2296 *Miss Rice. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I want to
2297 thank all the witnesses for being here. You know, I am so
2298 glad that, Mr. Chairman, that we are having this hearing
2299 today. But I just honestly am at a loss to understand that
2300 we are quibbling over this issue, you know, access versus

2301 cost. The bottom line is kids are being left behind, and
2302 opportunities are being lost, and that is going to have an
2303 enormously huge impact on the competitiveness of this
2304 country, going forward.

2305 Look, the inability for some families to afford Internet
2306 service has caused connection disparities along racial and
2307 geographic lines, as we have spoken about. We all saw during
2308 this pandemic, when students who lived in one neighborhood
2309 had extremely different outcomes with at-home learning than
2310 their counterparts in a neighborhood just a few blocks over,
2311 all because one student could get online, while the other
2312 couldn't.

2313 Affordability should not be a barrier to entry, and that
2314 is why I think all of us in Congress should be proud that we
2315 -- with what the EBB program has done. And we will see how
2316 this goes, as the application process begins.

2317 So, Ms. Chaney, I would like to start with you. If you
2318 -- just a couple of questions. Can you talk again about how
2319 the EBB program is going to help close the adoption gap?

2320 Do you agree that encouraging broad provider
2321 participation in the broadband benefit program will help
2322 maximize both consumer choice and increase enrollment?

2323 And do you believe that this benefit, this EBB program,
2324 should be made permanent?

2325 *Ms. Chaney. Thank you so much, Congresswoman.

2326 We absolutely support the Emergency Broadband Benefit
2327 program. We know there are areas where it could be improved,
2328 but, ultimately, we believe everyone should be very focused,
2329 and certainly our affiliates will be focused in working with
2330 the FCC to make sure that what -- that people know that this
2331 benefit is out there, that they know how to utilize the
2332 benefit, and they know how it would have vast improvements,
2333 you know, in their lives and in their ability to compete in a
2334 21st-century market and educational environment.

2335 So we are very excited about that. We want to partner
2336 with other organizations who are here, who want to do that
2337 outreach work. And we welcome the participation of anyone
2338 who is engaged in trying to make sure that program is
2339 deployed. And yes, we think, if it is successful, we want to
2340 see where improvements need to be made, but we do believe
2341 that having some kind of permanent program is important.
2342 Because otherwise, what is going to be the difference at the
2343 end of the emergency? People will still need broadband
2344 service.

2345 And what has not been talked about enough here, in my
2346 view, is that -- the fact that our world has changed, and we
2347 are not just going to go back to pre-pandemic levels, and
2348 standards, and norms. We are moving on. Everything will be
2349 more digitalized, and more -- there will be a lot more tele
2350 in all of the work that we do.

2351 And so I will yield, but I wanted to make that point. I
2352 think it is really important.

2353 *Miss Rice. No, it is a really good point, Ms. Chaney.
2354 And, you know, look, all of us know that we were talking
2355 about access and affordability of broadband well before this
2356 pandemic. But now what we can't do is ignore it, because the
2357 pandemic has laid it bare for all of us to see, and it is
2358 impossible to ignore, nor should we.

2359 Ms. Ochillo, I would like to ask you to talk about
2360 eligibility to receive a discount through the program. I
2361 have just talked about different communities that are more
2362 likely than others to lack broadband service at home. But
2363 one group that doesn't usually receive much attention is
2364 older Americans.

2365 *Ms. Ochillo. Yes --

2366 *Miss Rice. A lack of home broadband for older
2367 Americans makes it harder to get critical health information,
2368 make appointments for telehealth services, and even vaccine
2369 appointments. We have seen that in my district. So are you
2370 aware of community digital inclusion efforts to ensure that
2371 seniors are connected?

2372 And can those programs be replicated in other places
2373 around the country?

2374 *Ms. Ochillo. Well, there are several community
2375 programs that are making sure that seniors are connected, not

2376 just in New York, but nationwide.

2377 But I do think that one thing I want to drag in here is
2378 that one of the reasons why is because of librarians. They
2379 are actually one of the people who are my favorite. They are
2380 my digital social workers. They make sure that people
2381 actually stay connected when they aren't enrolled in school.

2382 And one thing I want to point out, if we are talking
2383 about economics, when we have people who are older adults,
2384 they are living longer. People are not just going to have
2385 one career. And usually that second career is going to
2386 require some sort of online training to up-skill. So we need
2387 to not only think about how do we get the K through 12 and
2388 the college students trained; how do we make sure that people
2389 are ready for their second career, and prepared for that?

2390 When we are talking specifically about the Emergency
2391 Broadband Benefit, it is not only that people don't know
2392 about it, it is that it is actually -- most of the
2393 information sometimes is online. So we have to actually get
2394 out into neighborhoods to make sure that people find out that
2395 they are actually eligible.

2396 *Mr. Doyle. The gentlelady's time has expired. Let's
2397 see, the chair now recognizes Mr. Duncan for five minutes.

2398 *Mr. Duncan. I thank the chairman for holding this
2399 important hearing. And I support the idea of a broad,
2400 bipartisan effort to address the need for rural broadband. I

2401 believe this means a focus on doing what will last for the
2402 long term, while also getting the most bang for the buck.
2403 That will require investing in fiber optic infrastructure in
2404 the ground that we can grow with, and grow the network with,
2405 again, so that we are not paying for the same areas over and
2406 over.

2407 We need to ensure that government isn't paying for the
2408 same urban-center broadband networks over and over again.
2409 That means emphasizing the work this committee has done to
2410 ensure that we are utilizing accurate mapping to help push
2411 broadband where it is needed: to rural areas in Appalachia
2412 and throughout the south and the west.

2413 There exist two or three organizations which I believe
2414 can get us to rural broadband coverage most efficiently:
2415 electric and telephone cooperatives and private-sector
2416 telecom companies. They have done similar things before, and
2417 I believe they can do it again.

2418 But let's let them plan for future growth, i.e. fiber
2419 optic, and let them set competitive rates that allow them to
2420 be profitable without being subsidized by the government,
2421 because the Biden ask, a \$100 billion plan, that is being
2422 proposed just doesn't work. And there is numerous examples
2423 where these Bidenesque plans have failed.

2424 In Senator Bernie Sanders's backyard of Burlington,
2425 Vermont, the city tried to build its own broadband network,

2426 and was unable to service the debt for the project.

2427 In Provo, Utah, Mr. Curtis's area, when the city ran the
2428 network, subscriptions were not enough to cover the debt, and
2429 the city had to infuse up to \$2 million a year from the
2430 city's energy department surplus funds.

2431 In Philadelphia, Chicago, Portland, Orlando, and others,
2432 the experiment with government-sponsored broadband is a
2433 panoply of recklessness and waste, with losses totaling in
2434 the billions.

2435 Another example, Salisbury, North Carolina, the city
2436 wound up \$32 million in debt, and ultimately had to lease
2437 their system to a private provider.

2438 In Groton, Connecticut, the city wound up twenty-seven-
2439 and-a-half million dollars in debt, even after selling off
2440 their network for less than a million dollars, and now their
2441 credit rating has been impacted.

2442 Lake County, Minnesota lost 40 million on that network.

2443 Burlington, Vermont tried to prop up their network, 17
2444 million in funds, but ultimately only sold it for \$6 million
2445 because of lack of interest.

2446 The examples are numerous, so why don't we focus on
2447 incentivizing the private sector to do this?

2448 And I agree with Miss Rice, who said, you know, access
2449 to rural broadband helps with telemedicine, and education,
2450 and all that. I think that is why we are all bipartisanly

2451 interested in this effort.

2452 Mr. Ford, I want to ask you, what is the quickest and
2453 most affordable method to get broadband Internet services to
2454 those Americans identified as underserved, without wasting
2455 taxpayer money? Because, with examples like I just
2456 mentioned, that is exactly what it looks like will happen
2457 under this plan. Mr. Ford?

2458 *Dr. Ford. I think that you are going to get existing
2459 providers, public or private, I guess, to extend their
2460 networks to unserved areas, if that is a possibility, and try
2461 to use a mechanism that exists to do it. And I think the FCC
2462 has a mechanism. There might be some quicker way to do it,
2463 but I am not aware of it.

2464 I think the FCC might be more open to some areas, but it
2465 is clearly to try to exploit what network is there now,
2466 through an extension based on subsidy dollars. That is the
2467 most efficient way to do it, and not to overbuild existing
2468 areas, which just doesn't accomplish the task.

2469 *Mr. Duncan. That is a great answer. Mr. Chairman, I
2470 want to just point out to this committee that when we needed
2471 to electrify rural America in the post-Depression era, from
2472 the 1930s through the 1950s, and even on into the late 1950s,
2473 we created a cooperative system, the electric cooperatives,
2474 that actually provided that. And those companies have not
2475 gone broke. In fact, they are member-owned, they meet an

2476 underserved area, they continue to do a great job, and that
2477 model should be what we, as Americans, look for to reach
2478 these underserved areas.

2479 And I would love to work with my colleagues across the
2480 aisle to figure out how we can do this without having the
2481 federal government pay for it, because that money comes from
2482 the taxpayers. And there is example after example of
2483 government-run systems which have been sold for pennies on
2484 the dollar, which have had to raise taxes or use other funds
2485 to help subsidize because they do not work. The private
2486 sector can do it better than anyone, and that is where we
2487 need to focus our efforts.

2488 And with that I will yield back the time I have.

2489 *Mr. Doyle. The gentleman yields back. I see Mr.
2490 Walberg is back.

2491 Tim, I would be willing to give you two minutes because
2492 you were cut off for about two minutes, if you want to ask a
2493 question in two minutes. Would you like to do that?

2494 *Mr. Walberg. I would, if you can hear me. Can you
2495 hear me now?

2496 *Mr. Doyle. We can hear you.

2497 *Mr. Walberg. I --

2498 *Mr. Doyle. We are going to run some fiber out to you,
2499 Tim, shortly. So it is --

2500 *Mr. Walberg. Well, I am blessed with broadband at my

2501 house now, finally, out in the rural community. But I was
2502 out in an area I was talking about, so now I have rushed into
2503 town, to Saline, Michigan, and I am at a bank parking lot.
2504 So now maybe I am doing an okay job here.

2505 *Mr. Doyle. All right.

2506 *Mr. Walberg. Let me go back, Mr. Ford. How would
2507 proposals that focus on future-proof networks and symmetrical
2508 speeds such as the Lift Act and the Biden-Harris
2509 infrastructure plan delay broadband access in unserved areas
2510 and, in turn, hinder the ability of Americans living in those
2511 areas to adopt broadband?

2512 *Dr. Ford. I think the purpose of those proposals, or
2513 the effect of those proposals, I would say, is to increase
2514 the cost of deployment, which makes it harder to deploy. It
2515 is going to make the subsidy burden go up, because those
2516 networks are not going to be deployed by the private sector
2517 because there is no point in doing that. Our networks have
2518 proved resilient over time, and upgrade when they need to.

2519 So I think it is going to be detrimental to deployment
2520 in rural areas.

2521 *Mr. Walberg. You know, I think it would, as well. Let
2522 me jump to another issue, Mr. Ford. Would rate regulation
2523 help close the rural broadband gap, or is competition and a
2524 light-touch regulatory framework a better way to get
2525 broadband to those who do not have it yet?

2526 *Dr. Ford. I mean, if the goal is to expand
2527 availability then rate regulation is a terrible idea. It
2528 just works against it, plain and simple. And it also
2529 increases the burden on society, from the taxation required
2530 to subsidize the deployment, because now, to get -- you have
2531 just made the business case worse, so now you got to -- now
2532 they are going to ask for more money to deploy the network.
2533 So whatever you think you are getting out of rate regulation
2534 you just gave back in taxation. So it doesn't -- it just
2535 doesn't make any sense.

2536 *Mr. Walberg. Thank you, I appreciate that.

2537 Mr. Chairman, thanks for your courtesy. I will yield
2538 back my 12 seconds.

2539 *Mr. Doyle. Okay, I thank the gentleman. Let's see.
2540 Next up we have my good friend, the gentlewoman from
2541 California, and my next-door neighbor in the Cannon Office
2542 Building, Anna Eshoo.

2543 Anna, you have got five minutes.

2544 *Ms. Eshoo. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is a very
2545 important hearing, and I thank you again for having it.

2546 I have a few observations before I ask a couple of
2547 questions. Mr. Ford has advanced something that I really
2548 have not heard of before in all of the hearings that we have
2549 had on broadband. And we all wish we had a nickel or a
2550 dollar, because, on a bipartisan basis, affordability,

2551 access, who has it, who doesn't -- but this notion of people
2552 don't want it, I don't find that to be a compelling argument.
2553 I haven't heard Ms. Ochillo or Ms. Chaney from the Urban
2554 League mention that at all within their membership. I think
2555 they are pretty darn close to the ground. And so I don't --
2556 well, I don't find that to be a compelling argument at all.

2557 Now, the issue of rate regulation has been raised. I
2558 don't know how many members have read all the bills. Go back
2559 and read them. You are not going to find rate regulation in
2560 any of them. If you want to call affordability rate
2561 regulation, well, tell your constituents that. Tell your
2562 constituents that. We know, if someone can't afford
2563 something, they don't -- access doesn't mean a darn thing to
2564 them. So read the bills instead of the talking points.

2565 Now, Mr. Walberg described a very powerful case. He
2566 hits on access, he hits on price, he hits on competition.
2567 The problem that we have in the country is the following:
2568 yes, we have the private sector, terrific, they all have a
2569 business plan. They are in business to make money, and we
2570 accept that. That is our system. But in their plans they go
2571 only where they can make money. So we have large swaths in
2572 our country, represented by Republicans and Democrats, where
2573 people don't have access. And if there is some access, they
2574 can't afford it. And there is the lack of competition. So
2575 that is what we are trying to fix.

2576 On this issue of municipal networks not working, you
2577 know what? I could list all the ISPs that have failed. It
2578 would be a much longer list. I will give you that list.

2579 And on municipalities having the power to establish
2580 them, we allow municipalities to have their own utility. I
2581 have one in Palo Alto, California, the home of Stanford
2582 University. So what is the problem with that? I just -- it
2583 is a kind of a little bit of political double talk.

2584 Anyway, let me get to my question, first, to Ms.
2585 Ochillo. To all of the witnesses, thank you. I have paid
2586 very close attention to what -- as you can tell, what all of
2587 you have said.

2588 On the municipal networks, how do the prices work? Can
2589 you give me or give us an idea of how much money people are
2590 saving, or the affordability of it, and how does that compare
2591 with private providers?

2592 Just very quickly, because I talked --

2593 *Ms. Ochillo. Just very quickly --

2594 *Ms. Eshoo. -- about my observations too long.

2595 *Ms. Ochillo. Municipal networks work a little bit --
2596 thank you for the question. Municipal networks work a little
2597 bit differently than private, in that they usually post their
2598 prices for their service tiers online. It is hard to compare
2599 municipal networks to private networks, because there is no
2600 standardized tiers. So it depends on which state and which

2601 company that you are looking at. But they are known for
2602 being lower prices, higher speeds. And also, they are always
2603 -- they always have a low-income option for all of the
2604 residents.

2605 *Ms. Eshoo. Thank you.

2606 And to Chris Lewis, congratulations. I think it is the
2607 first time you are testifying.

2608 *Mr. Lewis. Thank you.

2609 *Ms. Eshoo. Very good. In your written testimony you
2610 included a brief mention about how Arkansas recently changed
2611 its mind and repealed its state law prohibiting municipal
2612 broadband. What can you tell us about why the state made
2613 this decision?

2614 *Mr. Lewis. In short, the community called for a
2615 change. You know, Arkansas tried using subsidies that went
2616 to 2011, I believe, and those carriers simply did not choose
2617 to invest in all the communities. And so there were still
2618 people left out. And so communities heard from their
2619 constituents that something had to be done.

2620 *Mr. Doyle. The gentlelady's --

2621 *Ms. Eshoo. Thank you very much. I yield back, Mr.
2622 Chairman, thank you.

2623 *Mr. Doyle. I thank the gentlelady. Let's see, Mr.
2624 Curtis, you are next. You have five minutes.

2625 *Mr. Curtis. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As newer member

2626 of the committee, we have this unusual situation of being
2627 near the last. And I cannot think of a single time where I
2628 hope my colleagues are listening more than right now. And
2629 that is because a little over a decade ago I became the mayor
2630 of Provo, Utah. And as such, I inherited a struggling
2631 municipal broadband network. So I have lived this.

2632 The network failed, and it caused serious problems. Our
2633 local paper described it as a millstone around our neck. And
2634 it fell for a variety of reasons, most notably our inability
2635 -- and I hope people are listening -- our inability to deal
2636 with the fast-changing nature of broadband, and the large
2637 capital needs that happen on a recurring basis. And as a
2638 result, taxpayers over a decade later are still bearing the
2639 financial burden of that gamble.

2640 I saw firsthand the inherent problem with local
2641 government stepping out of their core competency.

2642 Let me be very clear. There are dramatic differences
2643 between streets, sewers, parks and, yes, even municipal power
2644 -- and I had municipal power -- in broadband deployment.
2645 When we put our network in place, nobody could dream of a gig
2646 speed. That was just 10 years ago. We upgraded it to a gig
2647 speed at massive amounts of money. And today gig speed is
2648 now in the rearview mirror. You have got to be talking 10
2649 gig.

2650 So, despite our failures and the failures of other

2651 municipalities with these networks, this plan still includes
2652 infrastructure prioritization for funding of these networks.
2653 Mr. Ford, can you speak to the track record of these
2654 government-owned networks?

2655 And do you understand what I am saying with the problems
2656 with the municipality dealing with this?

2657 We were called earlier by one of our colleagues
2658 "scrappy.'" As a mayor, I want you to know I actually
2659 believe that. I own that. But scrappy doesn't work with
2660 tens of millions of dollars, and billions of dollars, in a
2661 core competency they are just not capable of.

2662 Mr. Ford?

2663 *Dr. Ford. I think you laid it out pretty clearly
2664 there, and may be a better witness than I am about the
2665 details of that.

2666 We also heard earlier, from the congressman from
2667 Florida, a long list of the failures. And I mean, I hate
2668 that. I mean, I have had one here near where I went to
2669 university, in Opelika, Alabama just recently. I hate that
2670 it works that way. It is entirely predictable.

2671 *Mr. Curtis. Yes, and just because of time, I am going
2672 to move a little bit.

2673 After fits and starts, today the residents of my city
2674 have had free access to Internet for seven years, free for
2675 all of our residents. And I wish I had the time to discuss

2676 the layers of complications that you have tried to describe
2677 today with why people don't take advantage of that, and why
2678 we can't get every household to take advantage of it, even
2679 when it is free. And there are layers of complication that
2680 we are not really discussing in today's hearing.

2681 Now, let me switch gears just a little bit. My
2682 experience that I have learned through this process is the
2683 single biggest impediment to expanding network coverage and
2684 higher speeds and more locations, quite frankly, is
2685 regulation. And it is not just federal, it is local
2686 regulation, pole attachments and things like that.

2687 In one of my counties, San Juan County, 90 percent of
2688 the land is owned by the federal government, and it can take
2689 up to 9 years to permit across this federal land. That is
2690 not doing the project. That is just to get permitting in
2691 place.

2692 Mr. Ford, I have got a bill that is called the Rural
2693 Broadband Permitting Efficiency Act. I don't know if you are
2694 familiar with it. Can you speak to how bills like this, how
2695 bills like shot clocks and things like that, that some of my
2696 colleagues have, could help us accomplish the goals we are
2697 talking about today?

2698 *Dr. Ford. I think bills like that could be very
2699 important to pushing broadband out, particularly at the
2700 margins, and even outside that. I mean, if you have got a

2701 nine-year program, I mean, that is not going to work.

2702 And you also see that many areas -- I have talked to
2703 many providers who say, "I just can't build there. I would
2704 like to, but it just takes so long, and you put so much
2705 capital in, and you don't get to earn on it for years because
2706 of these processes.'" So I think that could have a huge
2707 difference, and it reduces the subsidy that is required in
2708 areas where that doesn't solve the problem, because you
2709 reduce the cost of deploying, so the bids will be lower in
2710 the FCC's auctions --

2711 *Mr. Curtis. In the last -- just very quickly, is it
2712 even possible to get where we want to get, where we all agree
2713 we want to get, without permitting reform?

2714 *Dr. Ford. I think it would be very costly, and it will
2715 take a very, very long time to get there.

2716 *Mr. Curtis. Okay, I thank you. And in my last few
2717 seconds let me just appeal to my colleagues.

2718 I would love to come talk to you, even personally, about
2719 my experience. Obviously, I have had some unique
2720 experiences. I have some insight on this. I think we all
2721 agree on the same goal, and I would love to share the insight
2722 I have with you on how I think we can get there.

2723 Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I yield my time.

2724 *Mr. Doyle. Thank you, Mr. Curtis. Okay, next is our
2725 vice chair of the subcommittee, the gentlelady from

2726 California.

2727 Ms. Matsui, you are recognized for five minutes.

2728 *Ms. Matsui. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr.

2729 Chairman, and thank you very much for having this hearing.

2730 We have been having -- we have been talking about broadband
2731 for a very, very long time. But, with the pandemic and all,
2732 we realize most of America has realized how important it is.
2733 And there has been many challenges here, but I also believe
2734 that there has been many ideas that are already working that
2735 we need to expand on further.

2736 And we also have to look at communities and how
2737 important they are, too. In, for instance, my community,
2738 Sacramento, there has been an additional commitment to really
2739 make sure everyone who needs broadband has access to it
2740 because it is so, so very, very important. In fact, when the
2741 CARES funding came, they used a portion of it to distribute
2742 to 1,300 hotspots at libraries serving more than 1,000
2743 families. And those who received the hotspot also got hands-
2744 on training to ensure they had the skills they need to use
2745 these tools.

2746 Now, thanks to updates included in the American Rescue
2747 Plan, these libraries are now preparing to extend their
2748 broadband service further into the community, reaching people
2749 where they live.

2750 Now, we have made progress. I think we already know now

2751 how much more needs to get done. The high costs of broadband
2752 service, digital redlining are still keeping American
2753 families on the wrong side of the digital divide.

2754 Now, I have mentioned libraries because they are
2755 anchoring institutions, and I really believe in -- Ms. Eshoo
2756 was saying how important the municipalities are, and
2757 communities working together. Anchor institutions are really
2758 powerful, and I look at libraries because they are powerful
2759 forces of connectivity by, you know, distributing the
2760 hotspots, and providing onsite digital training for those who
2761 need it. And this approach realizes that connectivity alone
2762 is not enough to get families online. Digital literacy and
2763 equipment training is a fundamental part of increasing
2764 adoption.

2765 Ms. Ochillo, what role can community anchor institutions
2766 like libraries, or schools, or community centers play in
2767 promoting digital literacy amongst under-resourced
2768 households?

2769 *Ms. Ochillo. Thank you for the question,
2770 Congresswoman. And when we are talking about librarians,
2771 they are -- very often they are the people that are actually
2772 -- about 30 percent of people who are living near the poverty
2773 line rely on their local library for reliable access. So
2774 that is going to be the place where they go for information
2775 on taxes, COVID relief, how do I get in touch with, you know,

2776 whatever services that they need, and they are also going to
2777 use librarians as a coach.

2778 And especially in schools, a lot of the times we know
2779 that, when students need reduced lunch and other social
2780 services, schools are going to play an imperative role in
2781 being able to identify who needs service.

2782 *Ms. Matsui. Okay, and how have public Wi-Fi networks
2783 or other community broadband access points helped cover the
2784 gaps in service?

2785 *Ms. Ochillo. They are essential, because very often
2786 you will have a large amounts of the community -- look at
2787 COVID. We knew that there were actually libraries that
2788 actually went in and turned their equipment outward towards
2789 parking lots, to make sure that people had reliable access
2790 points, because they fill in the gaps.

2791 So while -- whether it is you trying to figure out a
2792 solution with a provider, or your local government trying to
2793 figure out a stopgap solution, very often schools and
2794 libraries are going to be there to fill in the gaps. And
2795 also, they might be able to help support ideation, where you
2796 can get people together to say, "Should we build a mesh
2797 network? Should we partner with other people?'"

2798 *Ms. Matsui. Well, they are trusted institutions. That
2799 is why it is really -- libraries.

2800 Eligibility for Emergency Broadband Benefit expanded on

2801 -- by using -- by including Pell recipients, students getting
2802 free or reduced lunch, and those experiencing economic
2803 hardship from the pandemic. There is still a need for a
2804 long-term broadband subsidy to build on this work. And I
2805 believe that the eligibility for EBB should serve as a floor
2806 for our future work. And as we expand the reach of federal
2807 support, we need to ensure that those who are eligible for a
2808 qualifying program are not forced to complete burdensome
2809 paperwork, especially if they are without Internet access.

2810 Mr. Lewis, how can the federal government leverage
2811 existing databases to reduce the burden on families seeking
2812 broadband support?

2813 *Mr. Lewis. So hopefully we can learn from not only the
2814 implementation of the EBB system, we can also use databases,
2815 such as the SNAP database, other databases that can verify
2816 who is applying, and get them expedited into the system.

2817 *Ms. Matsui. Right, and so it is a good way to reach
2818 out in order to make sure that we are reaching the people who
2819 really need it. So, okay, great.

2820 *Mr. Lewis. You want to meet people where they are,
2821 yes.

2822 *Ms. Matsui. Absolutely, absolutely.

2823 Well, I am going to yield back seven seconds, Mr.
2824 Chairman, thank you so much.

2825 *Mr. Doyle. I thank the gentlelady for that. Let's

2826 see, next I believe we have Mr. Carter.

2827 You are recognized for five minutes, Buddy.

2828 *Mr. Carter. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to
2829 all the panelists. This is certainly important.

2830 But I have to tell you that I have got concerns. The
2831 proposal that we are looking at now puts nearly \$100 billion
2832 to fund broadband build-out, and the emphasis is placed on
2833 policies that lead to overbuilding in already-served areas
2834 and on government-run networks.

2835 We heard during this hearing about existing examples of
2836 cities that tried to build out their own municipal networks
2837 and failed, after spending significantly -- a significant
2838 amount of money. Having cities which may be able to sustain
2839 a network, build out government-run systems, can lead to
2840 additional strain on local budgets. I too was a mayor at one
2841 time, and I know what a strain it can be when you don't plan
2842 for the maintenance, or for having to upgrade, and those type
2843 of things. And that is a problem, a concern that -- or a
2844 problem that is often made with municipalities. So it is a
2845 concern for everyone.

2846 And the proposals that we have seen in this package
2847 focus on the idea that throwing billions of dollars to the
2848 issue will address the long-term needs of our communities.
2849 But I am concerned that too much emphasis is being placed on
2850 throwing billions of dollars into overbuilding, and not

2851 enough on long-term sustainability.

2852 Dr. Ford, I want to ask you, these proposals that are
2853 focused on injecting billions of dollars into communities
2854 without the notion or any notion of overbuilding our long-
2855 term sustainability, what kind of shortcomings do you see in
2856 maintenance here?

2857 *Dr. Ford. Well, I mean, if you build these networks,
2858 they are going to require -- with government money, they are
2859 going to require more and more and more and more government
2860 money over time. I mean, we spent \$80 billions a year
2861 maintaining our broadband networks, the private sector. You
2862 don't get out of that. As Congressman Curtis was talking
2863 about earlier, they are very, very demanding of finances.
2864 And so you are going to be talking about this every year, how
2865 much money you are going to write.

2866 *Mr. Carter. How much does it cost to maintain a system
2867 like this, any idea?

2868 *Dr. Ford. Oh, I don't know what the capital base of
2869 the network is, but, I mean, \$80 billion, at least, for
2870 nationwide. So --

2871 *Mr. Carter. How do --

2872 *Dr. Ford. -- probably 10, 20 percent of your capital
2873 base a year.

2874 *Mr. Carter. Exactly. And how are cities expected to
2875 pay for it?

2876 *Dr. Ford. Well, normally they will tax. They will ask
2877 you for it, which is the first task. Then they will raise
2878 electricity --

2879 *Mr. Carter. You said it right there, they will ask us
2880 for it.

2881 *Dr. Ford. Yes, absolutely. Yes. And in some cities
2882 that have municipal electrics, they will raise the municipal
2883 electric rates. That happens very, very often.

2884 *Mr. Carter. Right now the private sector's investment
2885 we have seen in broadband over the last 20 years has been in
2886 excess of \$1.8 trillion. And the ISPs invest three times as
2887 much per household than is -- than the providers in Europe
2888 do. My understanding that -- is that each year the ISPs in
2889 America apply about \$80 billion into keeping these networks
2890 up to date. That is just to keep them up to date, about \$80
2891 billion. But the proposals that favor municipal or
2892 government controlled broadband seems like there is an
2893 expectation that it will provide a better outcome.

2894 Dr. Ford, do you think that government-controlled
2895 networks are able to deliver better broadband?

2896 *Dr. Ford. Not in the long term, no. I mean, it is --
2897 there is a lot of evidence that that is not true. And,
2898 really, it is the long term that we are thinking about here.
2899 I mean, this is not a one-year process. This is a long
2900 process.

2901 *Mr. Carter. Well, let me ask you. Are there any
2902 examples out there that you know of where government-owned
2903 networks failed, or had to be transferred to the private
2904 sector?

2905 *Dr. Ford. Oh, there are very, very many of them. I
2906 have written about quite a few. We talked about them in this
2907 hearing. There is a long, long list of financial disasters
2908 in municipal broadband. And it is not that -- it is not like
2909 somebody else is paying. It is taxpayers that are being
2910 forced to pay the cost of those financial failures. This
2911 isn't voluntary, this is coerced participation in a financial
2912 failure.

2913 *Mr. Carter. I tell you, again, in my experiences as a
2914 mayor -- I was mayor for over eight years, and I can tell you
2915 that this is just the type of thing that gets municipalities
2916 into serious, serious trouble. And this is dangerous. I
2917 hope that, you know, we do everything we can to encourage the
2918 private sector to be involved in this, and to get out of
2919 their way, and let them do what they do best.

2920 And thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I will yield back.

2921 *Dr. Ford. I like your poster.

2922 *Mr. Carter. Thank you.

2923 *Mr. Doyle. The gentleman yields back. Let's see, Mr.
2924 Welch, you are now recognized for five minutes.

2925 *Mr. Welch. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

2926 Mr. Lewis, I wanted to ask your thoughts on how we
2927 provide an adequate and sustainable funding mechanism by any
2928 means -- it doesn't -- whether it is government or otherwise
2929 -- to address the affordability issue that we did on a
2930 temporary basis with the Emergency Broadband Program.

2931 *Mr. Lewis. Sure, Congressman. There are a variety of
2932 options, I think, at the disposal of the policymakers that --
2933 you know, we have a USF program that was built for the
2934 essential communications network of the 20th-century, phone,
2935 that can be reformed for broadband. And I think that is one
2936 possible way. There are other ideas out there, such as
2937 building a fund using spectrum options, or even through
2938 appropriations.

2939 You know, I think the most important thing is that the
2940 funding is long-term sustainable and reliable, so that low-
2941 income families can feel secure that it won't go away.

2942 *Mr. Welch. Okay, what is your view about some of the
2943 programs like Comcast has for a low-cost option for folks who
2944 are on that economic fringe, where they don't quite qualify
2945 for whatever the Lifeline-type program would be, but don't
2946 have the money to be able to pay the full freight?

2947 *Mr. Lewis. I think it is great that they are offered,
2948 and it is good that the trend is that more and more providers
2949 are creating these low-income -- low-cost offerings. It
2950 would be great if it was required that every provider provide

2951 it for someone who qualifies, and also that some of the rules
2952 that make it difficult for low-income families to subscribe
2953 to those low-cost options are relaxed.

2954 It can often -- you know, the Comcast program, you know,
2955 still may require a family to unsubscribe from something that
2956 they couldn't afford, but were -- in order -- for a few
2957 months, in order to subscribe to the low-cost program.

2958 *Mr. Welch. Okay, thank you.

2959 Ms. Ochillo, on the open access projects, that is a
2960 operating principle. Would that help, as you view it, to
2961 decrease the cost of broadband?

2962 *Ms. Ochillo. Very much so, because part of what we
2963 know is that, when providers get federal funding, there is
2964 really no requirement for them to share their infrastructure.
2965 So, essentially, if somebody even goes nearby, essentially,
2966 you have to start all over again. When you have an open
2967 access network, you have publicly-owned infrastructure that
2968 everyone else is tapping into. So you get the best of both
2969 worlds, in terms of having community infrastructure that,
2970 essentially, whatever profits generate from that stay in that
2971 community. And then also, you get the competitiveness with
2972 providers plugging into that network.

2973 *Mr. Welch. So how did -- just -- I want to answer my
2974 colleague, Mr. Carter's concerns about the private sector
2975 doing this. These open access projects, in a way, feel like

2976 a road, you know? Anybody can go on the road. It gets
2977 built, and then everybody can use it.

2978 But would -- his concern about getting out of the way of
2979 the private sector, would you see having these open access
2980 progress -- projects as an impediment to the private sector
2981 being able to do what it does do in some cases really well?

2982 *Ms. Ochillo. Not at all. And I think that, quite
2983 frankly, we are seeing more and more examples of open access
2984 networks that are working.

2985 But one thing that I think we need to be really
2986 authentic about this is the fact that there are always going
2987 to be talking points to protect providers and, you know,
2988 their investment, and how great they are at their jobs. But
2989 essentially, the reality is, when you go out into these
2990 neighborhoods, they also decide the places that they don't
2991 want to go.

2992 *Mr. Welch. Right.

2993 *Ms. Ochillo. So we can't have this existential
2994 question saying we want everybody to be connected, but then
2995 still fund with public funds providers who choose not to go
2996 to places that are -- remain unserved.

2997 *Mr. Welch. Well, it is interesting. That has
2998 definitely been a challenge we have had here, in rural
2999 Vermont.

3000 I thank you, and I thank the panel for your excellent

3001 presentations.

3002 Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

3003 *Mr. Doyle. I thank the gentleman. Let's see, the
3004 gentleman from Oregon, Mr. Schrader, you are recognized for
3005 five minutes.

3006 [Pause.]

3007 *Mr. Doyle. Is Kurt with us?

3008 Okay, I don't see Kurt, so I think we are going to go to
3009 Mrs. Fletcher.

3010 You are recognized for five minutes.

3011 *Mrs. Fletcher. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.
3012 Thanks to you and Ranking Member Latta for holding this
3013 important hearing today, and all of the witnesses for taking
3014 the time to testify. This has been a really interesting and
3015 useful hearing for all of us. And I think, you know, we have
3016 heard across both sides of the aisle that reliable, high-
3017 speed Internet connection at home is now essential for
3018 everyday life.

3019 We have talked a lot about students. We have talked a
3020 lot about the gap, and who is getting left behind. But from
3021 education to job searching and, you know, here in my home, in
3022 Houston, vaccine appointments are done online. So having
3023 access to the Internet in the modern world isn't a luxury, it
3024 is a necessity.

3025 And you know, access to affordable, high-speed Internet

3026 isn't universal. That is clear today. Whether it is due to
3027 the cost of the locally-priced plans, lack of existing
3028 infrastructure, or digital literacy and skills gaps, so many
3029 Americans find themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to
3030 using the services that they need.

3031 So, Ms. Chaney, in your testimony you mentioned that the
3032 adoption gap is three times larger than the availability gap.
3033 And I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that
3034 a little bit more today, and how the affordability has kind
3035 of driven these dynamics.

3036 *Ms. Chaney. Absolutely. So, I mean, so much
3037 conversation, we -- most Americans understand that there is
3038 an availability gap in rural America, but many of them don't
3039 realize that their neighbors are -- around them don't
3040 actually have access. That is because we see people on their
3041 phones. We see people being able to seemingly interact at a
3042 Starbucks or a library. The Latimer Plan talks a lot about
3043 libraries. As well as Ms. Ochillo, we believe they are
3044 heroes.

3045 But when the pandemic happened, we realized just how
3046 important that is, but how inadequate that is. Most of us --
3047 I am looking around -- are at home. We are at home, I am at
3048 home. And so, if you -- we are able to do our work from
3049 home. My mother is in the other room. My stepson is in his
3050 room, doing his homework. My husband is in our bedroom,

3051 doing his work. We are all here together. If we didn't have
3052 that, we wouldn't be able to keep up with our work
3053 responsibilities. We couldn't be able to get a little side
3054 hustle, if you are retired and you want to do a little work.
3055 We couldn't be able to manage the responsibilities of child
3056 care and elder care while being at home. We wouldn't be able
3057 to do any of the things that we are doing here.

3058 So we know that, for the vast majority of Americans,
3059 numerically and disproportionately, those are Black and Brown
3060 people. And so -- and they are also very poor Asian-American
3061 people who have no access.

3062 Someone wanted to talk to health earlier today, and I
3063 haven't talked about it enough, so I want to raise it here.
3064 In terms of language access, the ability to access telehealth
3065 means that, if you are a person who is having a difficult
3066 time finding a person who speaks your language in your
3067 community that you can get health care from, it means that,
3068 through telehealth you may have a service that has a
3069 translation service. You may be able to find someone in
3070 another community that you could not reach, who might be able
3071 to help you. These -- the innovations are endless, and they
3072 will only grow.

3073 So many people care about competition, and innovation,
3074 and the importance of industry. That will only grow on the
3075 other side of this pandemic as we find new ways to meet our

3076 modern needs with what we have discovered about being able to
3077 be online, and be home, and to be able to take care of the
3078 things we need. So very important, three times as much.

3079 So, you know, we don't have to have an equal response,
3080 but we want to have an equitable response, which means we
3081 absolutely must address affordability and digital readiness.

3082 *Mrs. Fletcher. Well, thank you, Ms. Chaney. I
3083 appreciate that. And I definitely agree with the shout-out
3084 to the librarians and to the libraries. They are such
3085 important hubs across our communities. So I agree with that,
3086 and also with the importance of connecting people and the
3087 opportunities that access -- for example, in telehealth -- to
3088 finding people to connect with that can really address
3089 particular needs is so important.

3090 So I want to ask, with the time that I have left, which
3091 is getting shorter by the second, but with this Emergency
3092 Broadband Benefit rolling out this month, what is the best
3093 thing that we can do? And maybe I will direct this to Ms.
3094 Ochillo.

3095 What is the best thing we can do to sustain the momentum
3096 that the Congress has created right now to expand adoption
3097 and in collaboration?

3098 And we have had some discussion of whether the EBB
3099 should be made permanent. Maybe you could just weigh in on
3100 that with the few seconds left.

3101 *Ms. Ochillo. Thank you for the question. And we need
3102 to make sure that people who are eligible find out about the
3103 program. So often we set up these really high expectations
3104 for these programs, and then we don't tell anybody about
3105 them. And I think there is this assumption in Washington,
3106 D.C. that people in other places actually know what happens
3107 here. So it is incumbent upon all of us to make sure that
3108 people not only find out about it, but that we educate state
3109 and local leaders, who we need as partners in this endeavor.

3110 *Mrs. Fletcher. Right. Well, thank you so much. And I
3111 have gone over my time, so, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.
3112 Thank you so much.

3113 [Pause.]

3114 *Mr. Doyle. Oh, I am sorry, the gentlelady has yielded
3115 back.

3116 I think we have called on all members of the
3117 subcommittee, so now we have some members that have waived
3118 on. And I think first in line to waive on is Mr. Pence, from
3119 Indiana. Is Mr. Pence available?

3120 *Mr. Pence. Yes. Thank you, Chair Doyle.

3121 *Mr. Doyle. You are recognized for five minutes.

3122 *Mr. Pence. Thank you, Chair Doyle and Ranking Member
3123 Latta, for holding this important hearing today. And thank
3124 you to the witnesses for appearing before the committee.

3125 For rural districts like the one I represent in southern

3126 Indiana, the pandemic highlighted a clear division of
3127 opportunity that exists between rural communities and our
3128 urban counterparts. There is no doubt that each of us here
3129 have heard stories of students sitting outside restaurants or
3130 gas stations to access Wi-Fi to participate in remote
3131 learning when their classrooms were closed.

3132 Unfortunately, that was nothing new for Hoosiers living
3133 in my rural communities. In my district, even before the
3134 pandemic hit, I knew students that would drive to the local
3135 McDonald's just to complete their homework because the
3136 broadband connection to their home was unavailable. This
3137 situation was not because their family didn't want to adopt
3138 Internet service, but because there was no service provider
3139 in their area.

3140 Just the other week, I had an opportunity to sit down
3141 with both Hancock Regional Hospital and NineStar Connect, a
3142 rural broadband provider in Greenfield, Indiana. Together,
3143 this team made extraordinary strides in making broadband
3144 connections to unserved areas to make sure the community had
3145 access to telehealth services. As a result, physicians at
3146 Hancock Regional were able to develop a portable camera
3147 system for COVID-19-infected patients to connect with
3148 infectious disease experts located at neighboring hospitals
3149 systems. This application is just one example of how
3150 telehealth is a wave of the future for rural patients often

3151 living several hours away from health care services.

3152 As telehealth became more critical during the pandemic,
3153 more and more physicians found that they could operate in the
3154 same fashion as in-person visits for pre-screening, post-
3155 follow-up, or rehabilitation services, just to name a few.
3156 However, these innovation -- innovative techniques will only
3157 get us so far without reliable access to a broadband
3158 connection.

3159 Rural Internet providers in my district, like New Lisbon
3160 Broadband Company, Smithville Communications, and Decatur
3161 RAMC, are community institutions on the front line of closing
3162 the digital divide. Our efforts should be focused on
3163 leveraging their expertise with federal resources to more
3164 efficiently deploy infrastructure into remote and unserved
3165 populations. Rural patients, seniors, veterans, and other
3166 unserved, vulnerable communities need to be our first
3167 priority when we talk about broadband equity.

3168 Mr. Ford, I am concerned policies being pushed by the
3169 majority will shift the federal attention away from areas
3170 that are completely unserved, and towards areas that are
3171 looking for faster speeds. Before we talk about 100
3172 symmetrical upload and download, let's figure out how to
3173 connect the remote parts of our country that have been living
3174 on the wrong side of the digital divide.

3175 My question: How could proposals like the Democrats'

3176 Lift America Act and President Biden's infrastructure plans
3177 lead to unintended consequences, and exasperate the digital
3178 divide in rural America?

3179 And in contrast, how would focusing finite resources on
3180 unserved rural Americans help bridge the broadband adoption
3181 gap?

3182 *Dr. Ford. Well, I think you made the point pretty
3183 clearly. You are going to distract attention. And there are
3184 limited resources for building network in this country. It
3185 is not like you can just go get anybody in the world to
3186 string fiber. I mean, those resources will get redirected to
3187 urban areas that may be more profitable to upgrade than rural
3188 areas that may be very expensive to deploy to.

3189 I think the point of my testimony is to focus on the
3190 problem, and that problem is getting broadband where it is
3191 not, you know, and addressing the people that don't have it,
3192 or don't buy it, that do have access to it, and forget about
3193 the rest, because you have got to prioritize where you are
3194 going to focus your attention and you are going to focus your
3195 dollars, unless there is just an infinite sum of money
3196 available. And these days I am starting to wonder if that is
3197 the way people think about it.

3198 *Mr. Doyle. The gentleman's time is expired.

3199 *Mr. Pence. I yield.

3200 *Mr. Doyle. Okay, let's see who is next on the waive-in

3201 list. Ah, the gentlelady from Michigan.

3202 Mrs. Dingell, you are recognized for five minutes.

3203 *Mrs. Dingell. Thank you, Chairman Doyle, and thanks
3204 for holding this very important hearing, and thank you to
3205 everybody who is testifying today.

3206 We have talked at length in this committee about how the
3207 COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the inequalities in
3208 broadband access. To my colleague from Indiana, yes, both
3209 rural and urban. I think we all experience that, it doesn't
3210 matter whose district it is. And it has underscored the
3211 dramatic disparities in access.

3212 These services are an essential utility. And as such,
3213 every American has a right to quality, affordable broadband.
3214 Now we have got to put those words into action, and I look
3215 forward to discussing what we do, as Congress, to achieve
3216 that goal.

3217 Ms. Ochillo, in your testimony you briefly discuss the
3218 need to hold providers accountable for serving whole
3219 communities to combat digital redlining. Are there
3220 incentives or guardrails that can be put in place to achieve
3221 this goal?

3222 And how do we ensure that subsequent expansions in
3223 affordable broadband to areas that these companies may not
3224 view as profitable do not come at the expense of significant
3225 compromises in quality or affordability to the consumer?

3226 *Ms. Ochillo. Well, thank you for that question, and I
3227 will try and take it in two parts, quickly.

3228 In terms of what can the federal government do to
3229 actually implement guardrails, that is something that we can
3230 actually put conditions on federal funds. That is something
3231 that, even if we say, moving forward, money that is going out
3232 the door must be able -- like, local officials should be able
3233 to enforce you going to the entire area, not just picking and
3234 choosing which parts of the areas are most profitable.

3235 To your question about what guardrails are in place
3236 right now, very little. You know, looking, like,
3237 historically over the past at least decade, local officials
3238 have less and less power when it comes to enforcing providers
3239 that are in their network, in their district. So the thing
3240 is, it makes it very, very difficult when they have very
3241 little regulatory teeth to actually say, no, you can't stop
3242 at this neighborhood, you need to go to the entire
3243 neighborhood.

3244 And so I think that, more than anything, we need to
3245 really rethink how are we empowering local officials to do
3246 the enforcement actions that maybe isn't happening all the
3247 time at the federal level.

3248 *Mrs. Dingell. Mr. Lewis, do you have any comments to
3249 add to that?

3250 *Mr. Lewis. Not many. I agree, I think rules can be

3251 done at both the local and the federal level to make sure
3252 that there are requirements to serve everyone in a service
3253 area. We used to have them. Let's remember that. And the
3254 networks that broadband was built on top of, the old cable
3255 and the old telecom networks, had build-out requirements,
3256 either at the local level with franchise agreements, or at
3257 the FCC for telecom networks, for phone networks. And they
3258 have been rolled back over the years. So we have been
3259 successful at this in the past, and we can learn from those
3260 lessons.

3261 *Mrs. Dingell. So I would like to pivot briefly to
3262 discuss digital literacy. Mr. Lewis, can you briefly
3263 elaborate on how promoting digital literacy is critical for
3264 our future workforce needs?

3265 And if Congress neglects to make a robust investment in
3266 broadband access and digital literacy skills now, do you
3267 foresee any potential long-term consequences for our
3268 workforce, our communities, and our economy?

3269 *Mr. Lewis. It is extremely important. We need to make
3270 sure that, not only are we giving folks the broadband that
3271 they need, but that they are prepared to use it in a way that
3272 is helpful to them and their communities' economic
3273 development. Digital literacy training can not only help
3274 with basic skills of using the technology, but also in how to
3275 use it in a way that can promote new businesses,

3276 entrepreneurship outside of your community.

3277 This is why we support the idea of the Digital -- the
3278 Equity Act that -- I think it is called the Digital Equity
3279 Act -- that promotes, you know, communities making digital
3280 equity plans to help do this work in your community, and
3281 specific to your community.

3282 *Mrs. Dingell. Ms. Ochillo and Ms. Chaney, I have got
3283 less than a minute left. Do either of you want to comment on
3284 that?

3285 *Ms. Chaney. I will just jump in to say we also -- the
3286 National Urban League also supports the Digital Equity Act,
3287 as well as members of the Leadership Conference on Civil
3288 Rights, and others. And we support making sure that we have
3289 digital navigators, and investment in that program, to make
3290 sure we meet people where we are.

3291 The only thing I would also mention is we have to make
3292 sure people even know how they would use the Internet. And I
3293 think that is actually maybe a problem of yesteryear,
3294 literally, than it is right now. I think all Americans,
3295 including many older Americans, understand the benefits of
3296 broadband, whether they are able to access their church
3297 services in a way that they weren't before. People who were
3298 once sick and shut in are now able to have community with
3299 people. I think that is ways and discoveries that -- again,
3300 I think there is a lot we need to be learning now about where

3301 people are, instead of judging where they might have been
3302 before.

3303 But absolutely, we have to make people aware of the
3304 benefits of it. And I have no doubt that -- I have never
3305 heard of anyone not wanting it. It is usually that they
3306 cannot afford it, or don't have it available to them.

3307 *Mr. Doyle. Okay, the gentlelady's time has expired. I
3308 see Mr. Schrader is back.

3309 So, Kurt, I am going to recognize you for five minutes.

3310 *Mr. Schrader. Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Sorry.
3311 Like everybody else here, we are multitasking today, and I
3312 enjoyed this hearing. This is a pretty critical here. And I
3313 would like to ask a couple of basic questions, if I may,
3314 right off the bat, maybe Ms. Ochillo to start with, and then
3315 Mr. Lewis.

3316 What is the basic level of service? Right now we are
3317 using the 25/3 to -- the idea being that that is adequate to
3318 make sure we can have access to schools, access to health
3319 care, good business access to conduct business. Do you agree
3320 that that is an adequate basic level of service?

3321 *Ms. Ochillo. No, and I just want to say that we talk
3322 to local officials on a regular basis, and one thing that
3323 unanimously comes up is that 25/3 service, while it might be
3324 enough -- it might have been enough before the pandemic, when
3325 we essentially had more than one individual using the same

3326 networks, and essentially needing to actually tax those
3327 lines, it wasn't enough.

3328 So we need to actually revisit whether or not the 25/3
3329 benchmark even makes sense, and why we keep sending federal
3330 money out the door. Public funds and networks that are not
3331 going to be adequate 5 years from now -- we need to be
3332 forward-thinking about what is not only the service that we
3333 need right now, but what is the service that we need 5 and 10
3334 years from now.

3335 *Mr. Schrader. Mr. Lewis, same question.

3336 *Mr. Lewis. I agree, 25/3 is not enough. As the uses
3337 of the Internet have changed over time, so has the standard
3338 for what kind of broadband is needed. So while 25/3 may
3339 serve 1 person well in streaming, you know, their favorite TV
3340 shows, it does not serve a family of 4 who are doing real-
3341 time video conferencing while their student is doing online
3342 education supplements.

3343 And so this is why, you know, thinking about the upload
3344 speed is also very important. It is why you hear the talk
3345 about symmetrical, because the more real-time video that we
3346 are doing, the more the upload speed becomes important.

3347 *Mr. Schrader. Is there a speed you guys would
3348 recommend, a minimum speed, based on what we learned?

3349 *Mr. Lewis. We have been promoting the idea of going at
3350 least 100; 100/100 symmetrical would be great, but I

3351 understand, you know, folks don't feel like that upload speed
3352 is necessary yet. But we are getting to that point.

3353 *Mr. Schrader. What about --

3354 *Ms. Ochillo. Next Century --

3355 *Ms. Schrier. Go ahead.

3356 *Ms. Ochillo. I said Next Century Cities supports
3357 increasing it, as well. However, it is not to the exclusion
3358 where we think that unserved communities shouldn't get
3359 service until they can get there. What we are looking for is
3360 that people can upgrade their service, and some people might
3361 need to start at 25/3.

3362 *Mr. Schrader. Okay, okay.

3363 *Ms. Chaney. Urban League agrees.

3364 *Mr. Schrader. What about the access -- okay, thank
3365 you, Ms. Chaney.

3366 Ms. Chaney, what about the subsidies? I mean, there has
3367 been some suggestion here today that, you know, a lot of
3368 these companies already give a 10 to \$20 subsidy for low-
3369 income folks in the city and in rural communities. Is that
3370 enough of a subsidy to get people to sign on?

3371 *Ms. Chaney. Well, I mean, I guess we will find out,
3372 right?

3373 I mean, so part of what we know is that, for many, they
3374 are not going to be able to afford even that. And it will be
3375 a barrier to them making the choice to actually endeavor to

3376 do it. There are some people who are so poor that these are
3377 things that they are making decisions about. What can they
3378 sustainably get on? Is it worth investing all of the time to
3379 get on and learn, if they think it is not going to be
3380 permanent for them? So, yes.

3381 *Mr. Schrader. Okay --

3382 *Ms. Chaney. Not the best answer, but yes.

3383 *Mr. Schrader. All right.

3384 Mr. Ford, you talked about targeted and untargeted
3385 subsidies. I tend to agree that we should target subsidies
3386 if we are going to use federal assistance for low-income
3387 folks, not just for their access, but to make sure they can
3388 maintain the service. What are the targeted subsidies you
3389 think that would be worthwhile?

3390 *Dr. Ford. Well, I think, in terms of targeting -- and,
3391 you know -- process to design a subsidy scheme, but they
3392 should be targeted to the sorts of people who are having
3393 affordability problems, and no one else.

3394 And likewise, the subsidy dollars for expansion should
3395 be targeted to areas that don't have broadband today.

3396 That is -- those two things, I think, from my
3397 understanding of what this hearing is about, are at the top
3398 of the list of problems that we see, a lack of access and the
3399 lack of affordability. So targeting to those two things is
3400 going to be the most important thing.

3401 *Mr. Schrader. Okay, okay, well, I would agree with
3402 that.

3403 We have got to work cut out for us, Mr. Chairman, and I
3404 really appreciate the opportunity to have that hearing, and I
3405 will yield back my remaining 20 seconds.

3406 *Mr. Doyle. I thank you, Mr. Schrader. I see Mr.
3407 Cardenas is back with us, too.

3408 So Tony, you are recognized for five minutes.

3409 *Mr. Cardenas. Thank you very much. I took the
3410 committee to downtown Los Angeles and back, and we are still
3411 going strong here. So thank you for putting me back in the
3412 queue, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for having this hearing.
3413 Also to the ranking member, as well.

3414 A lot has been covered today, but I want to reemphasize
3415 that, when we are talking about access, for example, one UCLA
3416 study estimated that 29 percent of Hispanic students and 27
3417 percent of Black students didn't always have Internet last
3418 fall. We are talking last fall, in the middle of a pandemic,
3419 where almost every student in America found out that they
3420 couldn't go to school and they had to figure out how am I
3421 going to learn, and they had to do it online.

3422 But I don't -- I want to also point out this, that that
3423 same study mentioned that 20 percent of White students didn't
3424 have access to Internet. So I want to emphasize that,
3425 because a lot of people think that some of us are in Congress

3426 and only representing one community. I believe that every
3427 Republican and every Democrat does believe in their heart
3428 that we represent everybody. So when I speak about students
3429 not having access, it breaks my heart to know that kids who
3430 look like me are disproportionately not accessing it, meaning
3431 that they are less likely to get the education that they
3432 deserve -- and we need to provide for them -- than their
3433 White counterparts. But the White kids are suffering, as
3434 well. And I just wanted to point that out.

3435 Eligible households will receive up to \$50 a month
3436 toward their broadband service, and even a one-time discount
3437 of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or
3438 tablet from participating Internet service providers if, in
3439 fact, my good colleague, Mr. Marc Veasey -- with his
3440 leadership, his bill, the Federal Communications -- will
3441 provide that through the Federal Communications Commission,
3442 if his bill were to pass. I just wanted to point that out.
3443 That will go a long way for the families of every color, and
3444 students of every color across America, especially rural
3445 America, where that last mile is just not happening with the
3446 private sector.

3447 In fact, this Friday I will be holding a virtual
3448 roundtable, and briefing for community partners and leaders
3449 in my district to talk about this incredible benefit. And I
3450 thank Acting FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel and her team

3451 for taking the time to participate in it, and to talk about
3452 this important program and how crucial it will be for
3453 everyone to work together to get the word out to communities
3454 across the San Fernando Valley, and across this country.

3455 I am also aware that Internet service providers have
3456 done their part, and really stepped up during this pandemic.
3457 I just want to give a shout out to an exception -- not the
3458 rule, unfortunately -- where Charter Communications had
3459 announced that they are moving every single employee up to
3460 \$20 an hour. They are not waiting for the federal government
3461 to get the \$15-an-hour minimum wage -- where it should be --
3462 they are stepping up.

3463 But like I said, that is an exception. Those kinds of
3464 efforts, coupled with Emergency Broadband Benefit, will
3465 surely make a significant dent when it comes to the
3466 challenges of affordability and adoption for low-income
3467 individuals of all colors and all communities. But that is
3468 not enough.

3469 Ms. Chaney, can you please elaborate on the need for
3470 making the Emergency Broadband Benefit a permanent,
3471 sustainable solution for low-income households and households
3472 of color?

3473 *Ms. Chaney. Oh, absolutely. I mean, first of all, let
3474 me acknowledge that the importance of what Charter did also
3475 means that people are having greater access to economic

3476 opportunity, which is also important for the Urban League.

3477 Let me say -- echo what all of us have said. We need to
3478 make sure that, at the end of this pandemic, at the end of
3479 this emergency -- God, we can't wait for that to happen --
3480 that people aren't -- that we are not reverting back, that we
3481 are not squandering the lessons that we have learned and,
3482 frankly, squandering the benefit of such an investment in an
3483 emergency broadband program. You invest in all of it, and
3484 then you just drop it, and people go back to where they were
3485 before. That is not, you know, a great idea.

3486 We want to make sure that there is an emergency -- there
3487 is a long-term, permanent broadband program, but also that it
3488 is sustainable, right? So we want to look at sustainable
3489 ways for funding it, and we want to make sure that it is
3490 continually renewed and reviewed, so that we make sure that
3491 the products that people are receiving are actually ones that
3492 meet their current need.

3493 So we want to keep improving the program, but it is very
3494 important that it be extended.

3495 *Mr. Cardenas. Thank you, Ms. Chaney. My time is
3496 short, so I just want to point something out, as well, that I
3497 believe does need to be pointed out.

3498 Unfortunately, when people in America think about the
3499 government spending money to help those who are less
3500 advantaged to get to where they need to be, I just want to

3501 remind everybody, 6 in 10 people in America who are on Social
3502 Security are White. Six in ten people in America who benefit
3503 from public funds going to help them have a life of dignity
3504 are White. So it is unfortunate that, in committees like
3505 this, we have to emphasize that, unfortunately, the people
3506 who are disproportionately disadvantaged happen to be people
3507 of color.

3508 But I just wanted to point that out, that what we are
3509 doing here today is going to benefit every American,
3510 regardless of their background, regardless of whether it is
3511 rural, or big city, or what have you, and that 6 in 10 people
3512 who benefit when we make these good decisions are White.
3513 Thank you so much.

3514 *Mr. Cardenas. The gentleman's time has expired. Okay,
3515 back to the waive-on list.

3516 Ah, from the great and powerful State of Delaware, the
3517 gentlelady, Ms. Lisa Blunt Rochester, you are recognized for
3518 five minutes, although I would say Pennsylvania has a claim
3519 to the president, too. But Lisa, five minutes is yours.

3520 *Ms. Blunt Rochester. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.
3521 And we are small, but mighty, little Delaware. And thank you
3522 so much, Ranking Member Latta, for calling this hearing. And
3523 thank you to the witnesses.

3524 This hearing is vital. In the wake of a pandemic, we
3525 have seen a phenomenal growth in telework, telehealth,

3526 distance learning, and the urgent need for digital literacy.
3527 And as the chair -- co-chair of the bipartisan Future Work
3528 Caucus, and a member of Majority Whip Clyburn's Rural
3529 Broadband Task Force, I know that in order for us to leave no
3530 one behind, we must meet the goals of bridging the digital
3531 divide, ensuring that America can compete globally, and that
3532 our citizens can live, learn, and earn. Ultimately, we must
3533 ensure that high-quality broadband is truly accessible for
3534 all.

3535 And according to Delaware officials across our small but
3536 mighty state, our rural, urban, suburban, and coastal
3537 communities, when it comes to broadband, access --
3538 affordability is a much larger issue for us than even the
3539 broadband infrastructure. That is why I joined my good
3540 friend, Mr. Veasey of Texas, in advocating for Emergency
3541 Broadband Connections Act inclusion in the December COVID
3542 bill, which created the Emergency Broadband Benefit.

3543 And I want to announce to any members who are still on,
3544 and to all of our constituents, that the EBB enrollment will
3545 begin May 12th. So please spread the word.

3546 And now I am proud to co-lead with Mr. Veasey the
3547 Enhanced Emergency Broadband Act, because all households need
3548 reliable, affordable access to the Internet. Our bill would
3549 provide \$6 billion to make the Emergency Broadband Benefit
3550 even more accessible to more low-income households. In

3551 Delaware, by providing additional full coverage subsidies,
3552 more low-wealth households can access the Internet and
3553 potentially incentivize companies to invest in these
3554 communities.

3555 And my first question is, Ms. Chaney, if you could, just
3556 briefly, briefly tell how might programs like the Emergency
3557 Broadband Benefit incentivize more providers to serve low-
3558 income areas that are currently underserved?

3559 *Ms. Chaney. Absolutely. I mean, I think that, as we
3560 see people getting online, and we see people utilizing, and
3561 we see the competition and the competitiveness that will come
3562 out of that, I think that we will have more providers who are
3563 interested in investing here, and investing long-term. And
3564 if they know that it is not something that is going to be a
3565 flash in the pan, it is something that is permanent, we will
3566 see that growth there. I think that, you know, the market
3567 will definitely work there.

3568 *Ms. Blunt Rochester. Thank you so much.

3569 We know also that a significant part of the
3570 affordability -- the crisis is really about the competition
3571 among providers. And unfortunately, in cities like
3572 Wilmington, Delaware and some of our rural communities like
3573 Harrington, we just see that there is not enough competition,
3574 which keeps the prices high. I was hoping that -- Mr. Lewis,
3575 can you discuss the relationship between digital redlining

3576 and competition?

3577 And aside from reducing cost, in what ways can people
3578 benefit from having increased competition among providers in
3579 their area?

3580 *Mr. Lewis. Sure, Ms. Rochester, where we see little
3581 competition I think we are more likely to see digital
3582 redlining, where a company may choose not to serve, or --
3583 sometimes digital redlining isn't just that they choose not
3584 to serve a neighborhood, but they simply don't upgrade the
3585 infrastructure there to get the newer, high-quality broadband
3586 speeds and reliable networks. So competition, hopefully,
3587 will drive them to want to serve those areas in order to get
3588 the subscribers that are there. This is happening in urban
3589 and rural communities and tribal communities.

3590 But it is really sad when it happens -- when it happens
3591 in urban communities, where there is the density, but simply
3592 not the value placed on those specific neighborhoods.

3593 *Ms. Blunt Rochester. Great, thank you. And in
3594 preparing for today's hearing, my staff was really unable to
3595 gather sufficient data on broadband access, because the
3596 information is not made public. I am proud to have supported
3597 the Broadband Data Act to require the FCC to reform their
3598 existing broadband deployment maps. But we also need more
3599 public data on broadband pricing speeds and adoption.

3600 Ms. Ochillo, in your testimony you stress the need for

3601 better and more data as we work together to address the
3602 digital divide. Can you talk about why it is crucial to have
3603 this data, and -- for sustainable solutions?

3604 *Ms. Ochillo. Well, I was actually just looking -- I
3605 had something on my desk this morning, because I pulled
3606 Delaware's statistics as I was just thinking about some
3607 things, and you would be surprised to find out that the FCC
3608 says that 96 percent of rural Delaware residents have 25/3
3609 access in their area, which would surprise the local
3610 officials there.

3611 And so I think that it is important for us to really
3612 confront some of these numbers. When we have the federal
3613 government saying, oh, 96 percent of your area is served,
3614 everything is fine, and then you get down to either their
3615 town hall meeting, maybe you talk to a county commissioner,
3616 and they are saying, no, that is way off, I think we need to
3617 find out what is happening in that disconnect.

3618 And it is not enough for us to say, in theory, we need
3619 to improve data. It is enough -- we need to actually get it
3620 done. And so we keep talking about possibly, you know, maybe
3621 we could add pricing, and, you know, hopefully, they will get
3622 more granular, and hopefully, they will actually adopt our
3623 suggestions to be able to correct their information. But we
3624 need to get all of those things done now. And then we need
3625 to actually supplement it with the information that is being

3626 generated at the local and state level. Otherwise, we are
3627 going to keep spending money that we can't target.

3628 *Ms. Blunt Rochester. Thank you so much. My time has
3629 expired.

3630 And thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

3631 *Mr. Doyle. I thank the gentlelady. Last, but
3632 certainly not least -- and I want to thank her for her
3633 patience -- from the great state of Washington, Dr. Schrier,
3634 you are closing up the hearing.

3635 *Ms. Schrier. I am honored. Well, thank you, Mr.
3636 Chairman. And thank you to our witnesses. Thank you for
3637 holding this hearing on a really important issue which has
3638 taken on even more urgency and attention during this
3639 pandemic.

3640 Sometimes it sort of takes that in order for everybody
3641 to pay attention, because access to broadband now translates
3642 directly to access to education and jobs and telehealth. And
3643 while this has touched all populations, it is so much tougher
3644 to address for rural America, because there are areas where
3645 there simply is no access. And it isn't just a matter of
3646 affordability for an individual family or business.

3647 My state of Washington is laser-focused on expanding
3648 broadband connectivity, and recently our state passed a bill
3649 that -- by State Representative Ybarra, opening up retail
3650 services to our public utility districts. And for those who

3651 don't know, public utility districts are unique to Washington
3652 and Oregon, and the mid-Columbia PUD networks currently
3653 provide broadband access to about 70 percent of the
3654 population in central and eastern Washington, which is mostly
3655 rural, and traditionally underserved.

3656 But we still have a lot of work to do. In Washington
3657 State, for example, we see strong availability in our urban
3658 areas, but access to robust connectivity fades really quickly
3659 when you go to suburban, and then really dramatically to
3660 rural regions. And it doesn't even stop there. Very few of
3661 our 29 recognized tribes in Washington have access to
3662 adequate broadband. So tribal communities, they have been
3663 historically underserved, and it continues, and that is why
3664 it is so important to have provisions like 500 million going
3665 straight to the tribes in the Lift Act.

3666 Now, we also know that partnerships are vital, and the
3667 people closest to the problem also have the best solutions.
3668 And I will be introducing legislation to create a year-long,
3669 competitive grant program available to establish state
3670 broadband offices, with the goal of creating public-private
3671 partnerships to expand broadband connectivity. And these
3672 partnerships can find really creative ideas for broadband
3673 deployment, and to close those gaps where the private
3674 investment alone, it just will never pencil out.

3675 So the hope is that great ideas imagined and implemented

3676 by really smart state broadband offices, partnering with
3677 private industry, could then be replicated and scaled up
3678 elsewhere in the country.

3679 So Ms. Ochillo, I wanted to ask of you, in your
3680 testimony you noted public-private partnerships are key to
3681 innovation and creativity, and that can get broadband to more
3682 remote areas. And it has certainly worked well in Washington
3683 State with one last year between Starlink and our state
3684 broadband office, bringing connectivity to the Hoh tribe. I
3685 was wondering if you could just give some examples from your
3686 own experience of public-private partnerships yielding new
3687 innovation for better connectivity.

3688 *Ms. Ochillo. Well, I think that they have been in lots
3689 of different states. And one thing that you mentioned about
3690 the state broadband office, some of the idea-sharing that
3691 happens in those offices is the most important thing that can
3692 happen.

3693 Look at the State of Colorado. Look at the State of
3694 Minnesota, Georgia, just recently in New Mexico. When you
3695 have -- and even in your state, Washington, you have a great
3696 state broadband officer who just added a -- is adding a
3697 digital equity officer. I think that it is really important
3698 for us to have a place for local officials who are looking
3699 for ideas to actually go for direction.

3700 And then also, for ISPs that are looking to expand, they

3701 go to state broadband officers to say, "Who were the best
3702 partners?"' So it is really important to have that place
3703 where they can actually intersect, where you have an ISP who
3704 is saying, "We have got great ideas," and a local official
3705 who is saying, "I want you here," where they can actually
3706 find out here are funding options, here are possibilities.

3707 So those are things that are happening in lots of
3708 different states, especially yours.

3709 *Ms. Schrier. Yes, I have been so pleased with our
3710 state broadband office because, when we talk about private
3711 industry doing this, what they find is that what they do is
3712 end up just putting faster fiber to areas that already have
3713 access, instead of going those extra miles to get people who
3714 don't have any access. And it really -- it is, like -- it is
3715 investments there where private industry won't do it. It
3716 just doesn't make sense with dollars and cents. But that is
3717 where we step in and say no, if we want to get this to rural
3718 America, just like we did with electricity, this is where we
3719 invest.

3720 So thank you very much, and I really appreciate that. I
3721 yield back the rest of my time.

3722 *Mr. Cardenas. This is Cardenas. Will you yield?

3723 *Ms. Schrier. I would be happy to yield.

3724 *Mr. Cardenas. Is that okay, Mr. Chairman?

3725 *Mr. Doyle. I guess so.

3726 [Laughter.]

3727 *Mr. Cardenas. Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to take an
3728 opportunity on her time to say thank you for having this
3729 hearing, and what a closer. That public-private partnership
3730 needed to be expanded upon in this committee. And that is
3731 how you get things done.

3732 And Utah, try it again the right way.

3733 Thank you, I yield back.

3734 *Mr. Doyle. You take all the time you need, Tony.

3735 Well, I want to thank all of our witnesses for their
3736 participation today. Your opening statements, your answering
3737 the questions of all these members, we really appreciate it.

3738 I need now to request unanimous consent to enter the
3739 following records -- documents into the record: a letter
3740 from a group of 40 undersigned business associations and
3741 corporations in support of a long-term broadband benefit
3742 program; a study from the Information Technology and
3743 Innovation Foundation; a letter from Asian-Americans
3744 Advancing Justice, Asian-Pacific Advocates, and National
3745 Council of Asian-Pacific Americans; op ed in the Austin
3746 American Statesman by Angela Siefer, executive director of
3747 the National Digital Inclusion Alliance; a report from the
3748 Benton Institute for Broadband in Society by John B.
3749 Horrigan; a study from the Technology Policy Institute
3750 entitled, "Does Competition Between Cable and Fiber Increase

3751 Adoption,' ' by Scott Wallsten; a letter from the Electronic
3752 Frontier Foundation; a letter from the National Digital
3753 Inclusion Alliance; a letter from the Healthcare Leadership
3754 Council; a letter from Western Governors Association; a
3755 letter from the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human
3756 Rights; a letter from the Student Internet Equity Coalition;
3757 a letter from the National League of Cities; a study from
3758 Free Press entitled, "Price Too High and Rising: The Facts
3759 about America's Broadband Affordability Gap,' ' by S. Derek
3760 Turner; a white paper entitled, "Broadband Build the Future
3761 by Reimagining Appalachia''; a policy proposal from the
3762 Student Internet Equity Coalition; a letter from the U.S.
3763 Telecom, the Broadband Association; a report from the FCC
3764 submitted by Ranking Member Latta; a study entitled, "2020
3765 Broadband Pricing Index,' ' by Arthur Menko, Telco Data and
3766 Business Planning Incorporated; an article in The Brookings
3767 entitled, "Broadband Adoption is on the Rise, But States Can
3768 Do Much More,' ' by Laura Fishbane and Adie Tomer; a study
3769 from the Phoenix Center for Advanced Legal and Economic
3770 Public Policy Studies, entitled, "OTIs: Cost of Connectivity
3771 2020 Report, a Critical Review,' ' by Dr. George S. Ford; a
3772 study from the Phoenix Center for Advanced Legal and Economic
3773 Public Policy Studies entitled, "Subsidizing Broadband Price
3774 Relevance and the Digital Divide,' ' by Dr. George S. Ford; a
3775 study by the Phoenix Center for Advanced Legal and Economic

3776 Public Policy Studies entitled, "Are Broadband Prices
3777 Declining: A Look at the FCC's Price Survey Data," by Dr.
3778 George S. Ford; a study from the Technology Policy Institute;
3779 a study from the Advanced Communications Law Policy Institute
3780 at the New York School of Law; a study from the Technology
3781 Policy Institute entitled, "Increasing Low-Income Broadband
3782 Adoption through Private Centers"; a letter from R Street
3783 Institute; and last, but certainly not least, a letter from
3784 the Americans for Tax Reform.

3785 So without objection, so ordered.

3786 [The information follows:]

3787

3788 *****COMMITTEE INSERT*****

3789

3790 *Mr. Doyle. I want to remind members that, pursuant to
3791 committee rules, that they have 10 business days to submit
3792 additional questions for the record to be answered by the
3793 witnesses who have appeared. I would ask each witness to
3794 respond promptly to any such questions that you may receive.

3795 And at this time, with my thanks and thanks to my
3796 ranking member, Mr. Latta, this committee is adjourned.

3797 [Whereupon, at 2:48 p.m., the subcommittee was
3798 adjourned.]