

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.
Communications and Technology Subcommittee
Hearing on “Defending America’s Wireless Leadership”
March 10, 2023

Spectrum is one of our country’s most underrated and economically valuable natural resources. For the last three decades Congress has given the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) the authority to make these airwaves available through the use of competitive bidding, or auctions.

Granting the FCC this authority has served both the public and the nation well. Today, the United States is a global leader in delivering 5G, advanced Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, and other next-generation wireless technologies to consumers across the country. At the same time, spectrum auctions, which have raised over \$200 billion for the federal government, have helped fund important public safety communications priorities.

Yesterday, for the first time since the agency gained this authority 30 years ago, Congress failed to extend it when the Senate did not act because of the objections of one Senator. The House did its work – we unanimously passed a bipartisan bill introduced by me and Chair Rodgers last month to extend the spectrum auction authority to May 19th. Our legislation would have prevented this lapse in authority.

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I am disappointed that the Senate did not pass the House's bipartisan bill, but we cannot give up and our work continues. That's why I am pleased that we are here today in a bipartisan fashion to shed some additional light on how our airwaves benefit consumers on a daily basis and keep Americans safe both here and abroad.

Some Americans may not know that wireless calls travel over spectrum. It is, therefore, the essential building block for connecting family and friends, providing access to emergency services during times of need, and delivering education and health services to Americans around the country. Without spectrum, we would not have wireless emergency alerts, the app economy, smartphones, messaging services, the internet of things, or drones. Many of these technological advancements were developed by American innovators because the United States was on the cutting edge, pushing the limits on how spectrum could be used in new and exciting ways.

These are remarkable achievements of services people rely on every day, but our country's past performance in aggressively deploying wireless technology does not guarantee future success. Simply because our nation led the world in providing consumers with access to 4G wireless technology and Wi-Fi does not mean we will achieve the same result in 5G, 6G, or Wi-Fi 7.

The stakes could not be higher. Failure to replenish the commercial spectrum pipeline and extend the FCC's auction authority risks our nation falling behind our counterparts across the globe, including China, in producing cutting-edge consumer innovations and enhancing our

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national security capabilities. And unlike the United States, the Chinese Communist Party does not govern with the fundamental values of democracy, free speech, and human rights in mind.

Time is of the essence. We cannot rest on past successes when China has already reportedly made three times as much spectrum available for 5G compared to the United States. Exploring and opening up our airwaves to allow for new uses takes time. That means we must begin now, and we must extend the FCC's auction authority, to prepare for the wireless technologies of tomorrow.

Leading the world in advanced wireless technology must also include ensuring that these advancements are delivered equitably to all Americans regardless of income or zip code. Unfortunately, too often rural, tribal, and low-income areas are left behind as next-generation technologies are deployed. Leaving these areas without these essential services denies them the many benefits these technologies bring to others, including job and educational opportunities, health services, and so many other things we have all come to depend upon.

Fortunately, programs like the Affordable Connectivity Program that we established in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law are helping connect these communities and the families living in them. The Affordable Connectivity Program has been incredibly successful since it was rolled out, connecting nearly 17 million families to high-quality and affordable broadband. In fact, every single member on this Subcommittee, on both sides of the aisle, represents thousands of families that are benefitting from this program today. This is especially important to highlight

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given that low-income families are more likely to rely on a smartphone and a mobile plan than a home broadband subscription.

We have a lot to discuss today, especially as we continue to work with our Senate colleagues to retain America's wireless leadership by securing our wireless future. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses. And I yield back the balance of my time.