

**Opening Statement for Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Oversight and Reauthorization of NTIA”
May 23, 2023**

Oversight

Thank you, Chairman Latta, and welcome back, Administrator Davidson.

The National Telecommunication and Information Administration (NTIA) is the principal advisor to the president on issues ranging from managing federal spectrum use...

...to working on domestic and international telecom policies, advanced communications research, and strengthening public safety communications.

It is responsible for developing a national spectrum strategy, seeking input on AI and privacy policy, cybersecurity issues...

...and more recently, running the largest broadband grant program in our nation’s history.

IIJA created the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment, or BEAD program...

...the Middle Mile Grant Program...

...two Digital Equity grant programs...

...and it gave additional money to the Tribal Broadband Connectivity program.

Altogether, this funding gave NTIA an additional \$48.2 billion dollars to administer on behalf of American taxpayers.

These initiatives highlight just how much NTIA's duties have changed since it was last reauthorized in 1993...

...and the need for Congress to reauthorize agencies whose authorization has lapsed.

Reauthorizing agencies in the Energy and Commerce Committee's jurisdiction is a top priority.

It is good government for Congress to consistently evaluate the duties and authorities of agencies within their purview.

NTIA has not be reauthorized in 30 years, and I am pleased that we are making it a bipartisan priority in this subcommittee to change that.

The discussion drafts we are considering at today's hearing would modernize NTIA's authorities to come in line with their 21st century responsibilities.

BEAD

Today's hearing is just as much about oversight as it is about reauthorization.

Millions of Americans still lack access to affordable broadband services, despite our federal government spending tens of billions of dollars on broadband-related programs over the years.

The BEAD program is poised to allocate over \$42 billion dollars to every corner of the United States.

Americans deserve to know that those resources are being invested effectively and aren't being wasted.

We are still waiting to hear about the accuracy of the newest version of the Federal Communications Commission's broadband data maps, which NTIA is supposed to use to ensure resources get to communities that need them most.

We're concerned by reports that the initial version of the maps was missing entire communities and inaccurately stating coverage in many areas.

NTIA needs to make sure these concerns are resolved in the new map before it allocates money to states.

NTIA also has a responsibility to remain technology neutral as investments are made, per congressional intent.

We need to make sure these funds meet each community's needs as the geography and use-case allows.

I was disappointed to hear that certain restrictions in NTIA's notice of funding opportunity would lead to funds being primarily spent laying expensive fiber...

...even in areas where alternatives like fixed-wireless or satellite solutions would be better options.

While fiber-optic infrastructure may be the best option in some communities, particular higher-density areas...

... we cannot forget about the importance of other solutions which can offer connectivity in areas unreachable by fiber.

I was pleased that the notice asked entities applying for BEAD funding to streamline their permitting processes.

Permitting reform is a top priority for this committee,

It is clear that the current permitting regime in the United States, both at the federal and local level, is not equipped to handle the quantity of projects and resources that the BEAD program promises.

This Committee is leading efforts to reform the broadband permitting process in the United States to ensure quicker access to broadband...

...and I look forward to working with you and NTIA to streamline broadband permitting to ensure resources aren't wasted and communications infrastructure is deployed effectively.

If we fail to take action now, these projects may not be completed within their deadline and could even stop receiving funds before completion.

CONCLUSION

I look forward to discussing several legislative solutions today to help ensure NTIA is carrying out its mission of strengthening American communications leadership and closing the digital divide.

Thank you, Administrator Davidson for being here, I look forward to the discussion.

I yield back.