

OPENING STATEMENT

[GAVEL] I call to order a hearing before the Subcommittee on Communications, Media, and Broadband on “Ensuring Solutions to Meet America’s Broadband Needs.”

I want to thank Ranking Member Thune for working with me to hold this hearing, and thank you to our witnesses for their testimony and participation.

Congress provided \$65 billion dollars for broadband in the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to fundamentally reshape the landscape of connectivity in the United States. The law deploys broadband, supports adoption, and requires new rules for inclusion and equity. This is a historic, bipartisan commitment to close the digital divide and ensure that everyone is able to participate in the digital economy and our interconnected world. I want to acknowledge what we have accomplished so far.

But now it’s time to put those resources to work. Congress must ensure that our Federal, Tribal, State, and local partners are able to deploy these resources efficiently to address real need and not maximize corporate profits. Every village, colonia, Tribe and Pueblo in New Mexico and across the nation deserves equal access to the opportunities this law provides.

Congress has good reason to be vigilant regarding the use of these funds. Without guardrails and prudent oversight, the money will flow to areas where companies can get the highest return. Just as historic inequities and redlining in the housing and financial industries meant low-income and communities of color were left unserved by housing and access to banking, digital redlining has resulted in worse service and higher prices for those same communities. An investigation by *The Markup* and *The Associated Press* conducted in October showed that many internet service providers offered their worst deals to formerly redlined neighborhoods. This article demonstrates why it is so important that the FCC implement meaningful new rules to prevent this digital discrimination related to broadband. As public and private partners deploy new broadband programs, Congress must ensure Federal funds meet the needs on the ground, not deepen existing racial and socioeconomic inequities.

We must also work with Administrator Davidson and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to allocate funds according to the true state of access to affordable broadband, as required by the law. With the Broadband DATA Act, Congress provided direction and funding to the Federal Communications Commission to develop cutting edge broadband maps. These maps have already proven to be a leap forward in understanding broadband availability in the United States.

I am deeply grateful to Chairwoman Rosenworcel and the FCC for all the work they have done to implement the Broadband DATA Act. NTIA will use these maps to make funding allocations for the \$42.5 billion dollars made available through the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. But the initial version of these maps still needs work. This version largely relies on self-reported data from broadband providers. Whole communities are missing from the fabric, like in my state, Shiprock and Cochiti Pueblo in New Mexico. We cannot afford to get this wrong. Fortunately, the bill recognized that local communities have the

best knowledge of their own connectivity issues, and it required the FCC to include a robust challenge process. NTIA should ensure funding allocations use the most accurate data available. I will continue to work closely with the Commission and communities on the ground to ensure the maps represent the true state of broadband availability in New Mexico and across the country.

We must also continue to find long-term solutions to make broadband access equitable across the United States. That's why I introduced the Digital Equity Foundation Act to create an ongoing source of funds for digital literacy, equity and inclusion on an ongoing and sustained basis. As the pace of technological development continues to accelerate, we'll always have a divide between those who have access and those who need it. We must weave digital equity into the fabric of connectivity in America.

This bill would supplement the existing Digital Equity program that was included in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill. It would create a permanent foundation to ensure long-term nationwide initiatives that can truly reshape the future of the United States. In addition, though funding is just beginning to go out for the Digital Equity, for BEAD, for Tribal Broadband, and for Affordable Connectivity, we will need to find permanent funding for these priorities.

Today, tens of millions of Americans don't have a choice between internet service providers. Their options are limited to whoever has cable running to their apartment, or fiber to their house, or wireless service in their valley. There are too many communities where market forces have failed. Congress acted to ensure that the millions of Americans who do not currently have access to affordable broadband gain that access.

I look forward to our discussion today that will focus on making that a reality, and to identify additional needs that might require additional Congressional action.

With that, I present our witnesses

Kimball Sekaquaptewa [SEE-KUH-QUAP-TEE-WUH] is Chair of the Connect New Mexico Council and Chief Technology Director for the Santa Fe Indian School. She has been a tireless advocate for connecting unconnected communities across New Mexico, and I deeply appreciate her presence today.

Jonathan Spalter is President and CEO of USTelecom: The Broadband Association. USTelecom represents a diverse set of telecommunications providers across the country working to expand connectivity through a variety of new and established technologies.

The Honorable Michael Powell is President and CEO, NCTA: The Internet & Television Association. Mr. Powell is former Chairman of the FCC and now represents most of the cable market and some of the largest residential broadband providers in the United States.

And finally, **Angela Siefer** is Executive Director of the National Digital Inclusion Alliance. She has been a tireless advocate for digital inclusion and equity efforts nationwide.

As we have the conversation today, I also want to stress that some of what we will discuss will only be possible with a full Commission at the FCC. With over a year since Gigi Sohn's

nomination, it's time to bring her nomination to a vote. I call on the Leader to prioritize her nomination as soon as possible.

And on a final note. This will be my last opportunity to preside over the Subcommittee this Congress.

My deepest thanks to Ranking Member Wicker. His tenure as the Ranking Republican Member on the Commerce Committee has helped shape national broadband policy, including the Broadband DATA Act and many others.

Much of what we will discuss today were possible through the hard work that Senator Wicker and his staff put into these efforts. The Armed Services Committee is lucky to have Ranking Member Wicker.

I also want to thank Chair Cantwell and her staff for their support this Congress.

[Turn to Ranking Member Thune for his opening statement]