

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on “Accountability and Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission:”
December 5, 2019

Congress mandated that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) do its work in the public interest. That means its actions, policies, and rules should put consumers first. Unfortunately, this FCC, under Chairman Pai, continues to turn its back to consumers - in favor of big corporate interests.

Time and time again, this Commission has ignored the voice of the people and has taken a different path laid out by billion-dollar companies. The prime example of this was the FCC’s action turning control of the Internet over to large corporations by eliminating strong net neutrality safeguards that protected a free and open internet.

But that was just the beginning. As part of an effort to expedite the rollout of 5G service, the FCC stripped away vital protections that help safeguard important religious and cultural tribal sites. Luckily the courts struck down this effort.

And it doesn’t end there. This FCC similarly attempted to strip away protections that promote diversity in the ownership of media companies. But again, the court struck down the FCC’s actions. And just when you think this Commission couldn’t slip any farther, the FCC intentionally undermined the ruling of that court, by approving more consolidation after the fact.

More and more challenges just like this are coming. In catering to corporate interests, the FCC has repeatedly stretched the law to the point of breaking. This has resulted in delays and unsuccessful initiatives that benefit no one.

Beyond that, this Commission has stalled when it comes to holding those mega corporations accountable for violating the slim safeguards that remain. We are, for example, still waiting for a conclusion of the FCC’s investigation into the widespread disclosure of real-time location data by wireless carriers. That investigation started over a year ago. This is unacceptable. Effective deterrence requires swift and decisive action – the FCC has demonstrated neither.

In other instances, it is as if this Commission has intentionally gone after vulnerable Americans. The Commission is proposing to cut off support to connect schools and libraries, rural health care, broadband deployment, and support for low-income Americans by capping the Universal Service Fund. This is shameful, and it preys on Americans that need our help.

If these failures weren’t bad enough, the FCC’s actions, or lack thereof, have put the American people in danger. We are increasingly experiencing hurricanes and wildfires, but the Commission is all talk and no action in the wake of these disasters. I have repeatedly asked this FCC to take steps to improve the Wireless Network Resiliency Cooperative Framework, but nothing happens.

Finally, the on-going Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigation into the FCC's Electronic Comment Filing System is producing disturbing results. I can't speak more specifically to its findings because the report is currently marked for limited or official use. But I ask Chairman Pai to dedicate the resources needed to quickly address the issues GAO has found.

It is time for the FCC to get back on track and put consumers first.