

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on “Our Wireless Future: Building A Comprehensive Approach to Spectrum Policy”
July 16, 2019

The topic of today’s hearing is important, because in the same way that we manage our water, our air, and other natural resources, we must manage our airwaves. That means carefully and deliberately allocating spectrum for the benefit of consumers, whether they live in a dense urban metropolis or in remote rural areas.

If we manage our airwaves correctly, new wireless technologies, including 5G, promise to meaningfully improve the lives of Americans. Educational institutions like Rutgers in my district will be able to provide greater access to their world-class education. Telehealth services will be able to better bring medical care to those in need over vast distances to keep us healthier. And small businesses will be given tools to help them better compete with big corporations. Smart spectrum management is also critical for public safety. In the face of increasingly frequent natural disasters, new 5G technologies could help first responders better locate us when we call 9-1-1 or help spread the word during an impending natural disaster so that we can prepare.

These examples just scratch the surface of why it is so important that we work together on a comprehensive spectrum policy.

Unfortunately, despite the hard work of incredibly skilled career civil servants like those testifying before us today, I’m increasingly concerned that this Administration is not up to the task. It seems that, as a nation, we are somehow unable to cobble together a coherent policy for managing our airwaves. Right now there is a leadership vacuum. And I’m concerned that too few people in our government understand that our agencies’ spectrum needs must be coordinated, and the government must speak with one voice.

A few years ago, Congress, the FCC, and the NTIA were working hard to keep the mobile economy moving forward. That’s not the case anymore. Today, the Trump FCC goes one way, the Commerce Department and NTIA go another. Then you have other departments throughout the federal government, like the Departments of Transportation, Education and Defense voicing their own opinions about how spectrum should be used. This lack of coordination affects a mind-numbing list of important bands of spectrum. In my opinion, the process has completely broken down.

To be clear this reality does not reflect the system that Congress created and that this Committee has relied on for years. Under the law, Congress charged the FCC with managing commercial uses of spectrum while we charged the NTIA with managing federal spectrum use. And up until now, that meant we had two agencies working together on relevant policy, but not anymore. It doesn’t have to be this way. Spectrum is, at its heart, a bipartisan issue. It’s a rural issue and an urban issue. And it’s not all bad news. The FCC is still conducting auctions and working toward making more unlicensed spectrum and shared-use spectrum available.

I also have tremendous confidence in the bipartisan leadership of this Subcommittee. In the past, we've worked successfully on spectrum policy and passed laws such as the RAYBAUM's Act, the Spectrum Pipeline Act, and the 2012 Spectrum Act.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to find a consensus approach to fill the void left by this Administration and resolve the pressing spectrum issues before us, including the disposition of the C-Band. How we resolve that band is incredibly important and troubling questions remain about the ongoing process at the FCC.

It's clear that Congress must legislate to resolve these concerns and provide the greatest benefit to consumers, with a transparent process that generates revenue for the Treasury.