

Opening Statement  
Chairman Mike Doyle  
House Energy and Commerce Committee  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
Hearing on “The Trump FCC: Four Years of Lost Opportunities”  
*September 17, 2020*

Our nation is in the midst of one of the greatest crises we have ever faced. As we approach the grim milestone of two hundred thousand American deaths from to Covid-19.

In the last few months we have seen double digit unemployment numbers as well as the worst economic contraction since the Great Depression.

According to the Director of the CDC, we might hope to start seeing positive impacts from a vaccine in the late summer to early fall of next year.

Simply put, the pandemic has changed the way we live our lives, and we will continue to feel its impacts for some time to come.

The Energy and Commerce Committee has been conducting oversight of the Trump Administration’s response to this crisis, and this Subcommittee is charged with overseeing the FCC’s response.

As the primary federal agency tasked with overseeing our nation’s telecommunications infrastructure - and charged with administering the Universal Service Program - at no point has broadband service and the work done by the FCC been more important to Americans as right now.

For so many of us, high speed broadband has become the means by which we work, live, and stay healthy. In the last seven months the internet has become the lifeline we use to buy groceries, see doctors, and interact with the outside world.

Zoom has become a verb, and Americans all over the country are connecting over video chat for virtual worship, family reunions, and so much more.

In so many ways, broadband has become the glue holding our society together - as our nation and the world weathers this storm.

But the digital divide is growing as more Americans struggle to pay their bills and to stay connected. They are struggling with services that are too expensive, too slow, and which place onerous and expensive limits on their online activities. For the tens of millions of Americans who couldn’t afford broadband before the pandemic, the digital divide is only getting greater.

Schools around the country are in the midst of restarting, and students are clicking into virtual classrooms. But for the over 12 million students who lacked broadband access before the pandemic - connectivity is piecemeal at best. Low income students are struggling to learn as

what was once a homework gap becomes a schooling gap. For these kids a lack of broadband is no longer preventing them from doing homework - it's preventing them from accessing the most powerful tool for economic mobility we have - education.

In Pittsburgh, school has been delayed due to supply chain shortages in getting laptops and hotspots shipped to students - something that's happening around the country. For some students in Pennsylvania, devices won't arrive until November. And while I applaud the heroic work done by our local schools to get students connected, our approach - like that taken around the country - is piecemeal at best. Local schools are hosting fundraisers with parents and asking foundations and corporations for help in closing the funding gaps. Schools don't know how kids are going to get connected or stay connected throughout the school year.

We cannot depend, as a nation, on the generosity of private companies to get us through this crisis. We need a national plan and coordinated federal resources - none of which this Administration or this FCC has seen fit to provide. Instead we have a government asleep at the wheel as our nation and our people struggle and too many are left behind.

To be clear though, we are in this position now because of mismanagement and misplaced priorities by this Administration and this FCC over the last four years. While Covid-19 is a new threat, many of these issues are not. Instead of addressing these challenges - and so many others - this FCC has been dead set on removing consumer protections, enabling increased consolidation, and hollowing out programs intended to connect low income Americans.

We need to do better. This FCC needs to do better - and you have the tools and resources to do so much more. On behalf of the tens of millions of Americans being left behind - I hope you will.