

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on “Challenges and Opportunities in the 5 GHz Spectrum Band”
November 13, 2013**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

The subcommittee meets today to continue our oversight of the FCC’s progress in implementing the spectrum provisions Congress passed last year as part of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012. While much has been made of the incentive auctions – and those first-of-their-kind auctions are incredibly important – we also took concrete steps to improve access to spectrum for unlicensed technologies, like Wi-Fi, in the 5 GHz band. Today, we will hear from witnesses that can give us an update on their progress in implementing those sections and what challenges exist to increased unlicensed use.

Unlicensed wireless technologies have become an indispensable part of our information infrastructure in America. As a compliment to both our residential and business wired Internet connections as well as a component of our mobile wireless devices, Wi-Fi, perhaps the most prolific use of unlicensed spectrum, has spread from its humble origins in the technical community to near ubiquity.

It now helps farmers in rural America allocate water and fertilizer to meet the exact needs of a specific crop thus increasing productivity and reducing cost. It has allowed businesses of all kinds to more efficiently manage inventories, distribution and manufacturing processes thus increasing productivity. It allows consumers to communicate on the go and to watch the video services they want where and when they want to. Unlicensed spectrum technologies have allowed all of us to use devices that have made our lives safer, and more convenient, connected, informative and entertaining. It has and will continue to help create billions of dollars of economic growth and hundreds of thousands of jobs all across America.

The spectrum provisions that were signed into law last year had their beginnings in this subcommittee. We instructed the NTIA and the FCC to begin the process of bringing additional spectrum into the unlicensed marketplace by first asking them to assess the feasibility of doing so without causing harmful interference to licensed operators already occupying the band. Just as we had a central focus on ensuring that broadcasting remained a viable service after the incentive auction, so too did we have a focus on ensuring that new unlicensed uses were in addition to and not interfering with existing licensed services.

The 5 GHz ecosystem is teeming with existing uses. From critical government radar systems to commercial satellites, there are a host of licensed services that are already deployed in this band. Today we will also hear from one of the promising, but unrealized, licensed uses of this band: intelligent transportation systems for smarter, safer vehicles. However, it is important to also note that 5 GHz is also currently being used for Wi-Fi and other unlicensed uses. Thanks to technical rules that limit power and require certain mitigation technologies, these systems are currently meeting our licensed and unlicensed needs without interfering with one another.

I am looking forward to hearing from our very qualified witnesses today on both the potential that this spectrum holds to fuel the next generation of unlicensed wireless technologies and the benefits they will bring, but also the technical and economic challenges to making the most of the band. I think I speak for many of my colleagues when I say that we are excited to see the fruits of this subcommittee’s labor come to fruition in the form of faster and more abundant Wi-Fi, but not at the expense of existing licensed services. These services can coexist and thanks to the hard work of the industries and agencies represented by our witnesses, we don’t have to choose between better Internet access and safer cars.

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