

Chairman John Kennedy Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government
Hearing to Conduct Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission Spectrum Auctions
Program

June 16, 2020

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning. The subcommittee will come to order.

Today we convene under different circumstances than any of our previous hearings.

Under guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and the Office of Attending physician, Members are spaced farther apart, staff is reduced, and the general public is watching online rather than filling up this room.

So today's hearing will look a little different. Similarly, the halls of Congress also look and feel a little different. Small businesses, if they are allowed to open at all, are operating under very different circumstances. American homes have become both classrooms and offices for millions of families. American life, as we knew it, has changed. Yet unfortunately, access—or inaccess—to broadband Internet services, particularly in rural areas, remains unchanged.

Today's witness, Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai, is one of our government's foremost experts on broadband Internet access

Chairman Pai, thank you for being here.

Today, the Subcommittee will hear from the Chairman about the agency's Spectrum Auctions Programs.

We will address the critical need to expand broadband access to areas in this country that continue to lag further and further behind.

And we will discuss the agency's response to the ever growing demand for wireless services, including the Commission's decisions surrounding the C-Band.

Everyone in this rooms knows that I have been outspoken about this mid-band spectrum.

I was an early proponent for a public auction as both a transparent means to allocate the C-band and as an assurance that Luxembourg satellite companies and their shareholders would not be the beneficiaries of a windfall that should go to the American people.

I was pleased the Chairman ultimately announced his support for a public auction last year.

Unfortunately, my pleasure was short lived, as the parameters of the Commission's plan became known.

I opposed the Commission's proposal to provide \$15 billion in various payments to satellite operators—those funds could be used to expand broadband in rural areas, help students connect to the Internet to complete their homework, or simply pay down our ever-mounting national debt.

I authored a bill to do these things.

Rather than work with Congress on a solution, the Commission moved forward with their handouts to Luxembourg.

Earlier this month, the FCC celebrated that foreign satellite companies were taking them up on their offer.

Like Captain Renault, I was shocked—shocked—to find that these companies were willing to give up something they didn't own in exchange for billions and billions of dollars.

We should all be so lucky.

So today we will also explore the Commission's decision to require these windfall payments to satellite operators.

Before introducing our witness, I turn to my colleague for his opening remarks.

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