Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT
Online Event

"Policy Issues for Telecom Transformation"

Opening Remarks by Representative Mike Doyle

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FEATURING
Representative Mike Doyle (D-PA)
Chairman, House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology

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James Andrew Lewis: We did pretty well as a country in managing the challenges with 5G. But there's more ahead. For this discussion, we will have opening remarks by Congressman Mike Doyle, chairman of the House Energy Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology. He'll be followed by Rob Blair, senior director for 5G and external affairs at Microsoft – thanks, Rob, for joining – Danielle Kriz, senior director of global policy, Palo Alto Networks – also, thanks – Dr. Sheryl Genco, vice president, Advanced Technology Group at Ericsson, and last but not least, Clete Johnson, who's a partner and also a senior fellow at CSIS, a partner at Wilkinson Barker Knauer.

All of them – when you look at them – Rob, Sheryl, Clete – all of them have a commerce background so this is a commerce-heavy panel today. But I think we'll have a good discussion.

The ground rules are pretty simple. They'll each talk for five or 10 minutes, and we'll follow this by discussion and questions and answers that you can submit from the audience if you want.

So with that, why don't we go ahead and have Congressman Doyle open the session?

Thank you.

Representative Mike Doyle (D-PA): Thank you for the warm introduction, and thank you to the Center for Strategic and International Studies for the invitation. It's good to be able to speak with you all today.

You know, it's an understatement to say that technology is embedded in our lives today. I'm sure many of you have more than one phone in your pockets, have viewed multiple screens already today, and have used those devices for your jobs, to connect with friends, and watch videos or otherwise consume entertainment.

Regardless of what we are using our devices for, it's increasingly clear that the use of technology is essential for our everyday lives. Our students must have devices and broadband connectivity to fully take advantage of their educational opportunities. Many more employees are working remotely due to COVID. And our businesses, factories, and transportation systems are fundamentally reliant on broadband and connected equipment.

The private sector has done so much to move us forward, creating jobs and transforming our economy. And it's been truly amazing to watch. But of course, none of these things are happening in a vacuum. It is incumbent upon the federal government, all governments, I'd argue, to enact policies

that foster and make room for these innovations and businesses. So today I want to give you an update on what the U.S. Congress has been doing on this front, and the issues I've been focused on as chair of communications and technology subcommittee.

First, the quality of our communication networks means nothing to consumers who cannot access them. It is unacceptable consumers in the year 2021 lack adequate high-speed broadband at home. It's unacceptable that our students have had to sit in parking lots of fast-food restaurants or outside their local library to connect to wi-fi. It's unacceptable that patients lack reliable upload speeds to talk to their healthcare providers. And it's unacceptable that we have millions of Americans who still struggle to pay their bills.

And that is why Congress recently passed the largest single investment for broadband deployment and adoption in our nation's history. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is directly addressing these important issues and is finally putting the United States on the path to 100 percent connectivity. In the coming months, Congress will be working with the administration to ensure these programs roll out smoothly and function as intended.

We passed the bill, but now we must oversee its implementation. We have to ensure that broadband is accessible and affordable for all Americans. Second, we must continue the effort to create an environment for our networks to flourish. As you may know, I've been advancing the Spectrum Innovation Act to encourage the federal government to maximize the amount of mid-band spectrum available for consumer use.

People are heavily dependent on their mobile phones today, and upset when they lose service, or their ability to connect to in-home devices and TVs, or to wi-fi and Bluetooth. And there are many other uses that consumers never even pause to wonder about how they work, like our garage door openers, baby monitors, and health trackers, for example. The average consumer probably hasn't thought of how wireless and spectrum-enabled technologies fuel businesses, bring products to them faster and more efficiently. And that's not including all the indirect benefits spectrum policy enables.

Whether or not we realize it, all of us have benefitted from the rise of the app economy, whether as a consumer, employee, or entrepreneur. So spectrum policy, while not at the front of the consumers' minds, is vitally important. The centerpiece of the Spectrum Innovation Act, the 3.1-3.45 band, has the coverage and the data-transmitting capacity to bring new wireless broadband capacity online for consumers. Through the new infrastructure law, direct some reallocation of the band for private sector use, we must ensure maximum utilization of the band.

And so the Spectrum Innovation Act builds on what Congress has done so far to really push the federal government to squeeze as much out of the band as possible for consumers. Which spectrum bands we reallocate and how much is crucial, but how we do so is as well. It's imperative that we reallocate spectrum through the long-standing policy processes that have proven successful in the past. Making a single spectrum stakeholder and incumbent user the final arbiter of reallocation decisions will almost certainly not lead to better outcomes for our country.

There is no question that the operation of existing federal spectrum users are important and necessary, and that those operations must be protected. We aren't making more spectrum. And as much as consumers are using more data and demanding more spectrum to provide that capacity, so too are our federal agencies. But when we are balancing multiple public policy goals, no single stakeholder should have final say over the reallocation process. That's why my colleagues and I thought it was so important to reemphasize the time-tested role of NTIA, in coordination with the FCC and the White House, in working together to make these decisions in an equitable fashion. I'm confident that with the input of all stakeholders we can find a path forward that makes as much spectrum as possible available for consumer use, innovation, and economic activity, while also protecting important federal operations.

I believe it would be worthwhile to provide additional guidance and oversight from Congress on these issues. The Energy and Commerce Committee has advanced legislation to require the FCC and the NTIA to update their memorandum of understanding on spectrum coordination. And there are other ideas worth exploring as well, such as how the Spectrum Reallocation Fund should be updated to give agencies more flexibility to make spectrum available to consumers.

The federal government should also look to hire additional engineers and technical staff to grapple with these weedy issues. Smart federal policy on spectrum and related policy areas will continue to be instrumental for creating a world where networks will continue to grow and technological advances make their way to consumers.

Third and finally, we need to look ahead to what is over the horizon. As I mentioned before, Congress has just taken major action to bring high-speed connectivity to the entire nation. The networks funded by this effort are going to allow tremendous speeds for consumers and businesses. The number of connected devices is ready to explode and we really must begin consideration of the policy implications of this right now.

Since I started serving in Congress, I've watched wireless networks transform from the first iterations of digital technology to 3G, 4G, and now 5G networks, where we will see speeds of more than one gigabit. While these innovations have been extraordinary, the benefits haven't flowed to all Americans equally. Policy issues have arisen from this that have required congressional action and regulatory steps from the FCC.

For Congress and other policymakers to be best positioned to address future issues, we need to consider the next generation, 6G wireless technology, now. And I am proud that the House earlier this month passed the Future Networks Act that I introduced with Representatives Lucy McBath and Bill Johnson. This bill would require the FCC to create a 6G taskforce to report on the possible uses, strengths, and limitations of 6G, including any supply chain, cybersecurity, or other limitations that will need to be addressed as this wireless technology evolves.

Importantly, the taskforce would be comprised of a wide range of stakeholders including members of Congress, industry, public interest groups, and representatives from every level of government, including tribes, and would lay the groundwork for policy considerations that will certainly arise. Such an approach is good forward-looking governance.

I'm hopeful the Senate will consider this bill soon because companies are working fast on the next generation of networks. The sooner we begin to look at these issues ourselves, the more likely Congress and the country will be to have a policy framework in place that serves our businesses and consumers well.

So, as always with technology policy, there is plenty for Congress and the federal government to consider. American consumers and businesses will both benefit and come to rely on new innovations, and our government needs to do all it can to create a framework that allows such activity to flourish. I'm confident that we will rise to the challenges ahead and have a brighter broadband future and continue America's technological leadership.

Thank you for having me today.