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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission”
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
July 10, 2012

Thank you Chairman Walden for holding this hearing, and welcome back Chairman Genachowski and Commissioners Clyburn and McDowell. I am pleased that we are also joined by the two newest FCC commissioners, Jessica Rosenworcel and Ajit Pai. I am sure you are both going to prove worthy of the long wait to be confirmed, and I look forward to working with you.

The communications and technology industry is a source of incredible innovation and an engine of national economic growth. The FCC’s charge – to promote robust competition, ensure access to service for all, and safeguard the American consumer – becomes all the more important as these technologies play an increasing role in our daily lives.

As recent weather related incidents made abundantly clear, Americans rely on broadband devices and applications more than ever, and our lives are greatly enhanced by access to these critical services.

The massive power outages throughout the mid-Atlantic region led millions of Americans to malls and coffee shops -- not necessarily to seek an air conditioned environment, shop, or drink coffee, but to recharge their phones, tablets, and computers. These devices needed to have power in large part so that they could be connected to the Internet.

In light of our increasing reliance on the Internet, it is imperative that our communications laws and regulatory policies not only continue to promote the innovation that our nation exports worldwide, but also ensure that Americans have reliable, affordable, access to the Internet at home.

Earlier this year, Congress passed legislation charging the FCC with carrying out two critical tasks: ensuring interoperability for a nationwide broadband network for first responders and making more spectrum available for mobile broadband through incentive auctions. I am

pleased that the Chairman has retained a world-class team to help design and implement this unprecedented auction.

I also understand the FCC is now considering how to integrate jurisdictions that had previously received waivers to build-out their public safety network into FirstNet. I strongly urge the Commission to limit the potential for early builders to undermine the long term success of FirstNet.

The FCC has also taken long overdue steps to modernize the high-cost and low-income Universal Service Fund programs. These limited public dollars must be used wisely to connect the millions of Americans unserved by broadband or facing barriers to adoption. I urge you to continue moving forward with reform. Under Chairman Genachowski's leadership, you are collectively making the tough policy calls that need to be made and I support your efforts.

Special access is another area long overdue for reform. There is widespread agreement that the current deregulatory "triggers" are broken, even from many incumbent providers of these services. I hope the Commission will move quickly to gather additional industry data as needed and address the potentially anticompetitive terms and conditions in special access contracts.

Finally, I urge the Commission to scrutinize carefully the transactions between Verizon and four of the nation's largest cable companies. Serious questions have been raised about the impact these integrated deals will have on video, broadband, and wireless competition.

We are hearing from a variety of corporate and public interest stakeholders who are very concerned about what these deals mean for competition. The Department of Justice and the FCC both have important responsibilities in this process and should coordinate their respective reviews as the agencies examine these proposed arrangements. I look forward to your testimony and want to thank you again for appearing before our committee today.