

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN TOM WHEELER**

Re: *Inquiry Concerning the Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans in a Reasonable and Timely Fashion, and Possible Steps to Accelerate Such Deployment Pursuant to Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, as Amended by the Broadband Data Improvement Act*, GN Docket No. 15-191.

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan famously said, “Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts.” Today, we release the facts about broadband deployment in the United States – the 2016 Broadband Progress Report. This analysis fulfills our statutory mandate to assess and report annually on whether *advanced* telecommunications are being deployed to *all* Americans in a reasonable and timely fashion. So what are the facts when it comes to broadband in America?

Fact #1: In the most recent year measured, our nation made significant progress in broadband deployment. The number of Americans lacking access to fixed broadband at the FCC’s benchmark speed of 25 Mbps for downloads, 3 Mbps for uploads dropped from 55 million to 34 million. That’s a nearly 40 percent reduction in the number of unserved Americans in only one year.

Fact #2: Despite recent gains, we are still fall short of the statutory goal of universal access to fixed high-speed broadband. Approximately 34 million Americans still lack access to fixed broadband at 25/3.

Fact #3: The urban-rural digital divide persists and is significant. Thirty-nine percent of Americans living in rural areas lack access to 25 Mbps/3 Mbps, compared to 4 percent of urban Americans. On Tribal Lands in rural America, 68 percent lack access.

Fact #4: Our schools and libraries still face a connectivity gap. Forty-one percent of schools have not met the Commission’s short-term goal of 100 Mbps per 1,000 students/staff. And a much smaller percentage have met the longer-term goal of 1 Gbps/1,000 users.

Fact #5: Americans rely more and more on mobile broadband service. This is particularly true of low income and minority consumers. Americans use their smart phones and tablets to access the Internet on the go so much that the concept of “advanced telecommunications” as Congress defined it must include access to both fixed and mobile broadband.

Congress directed the Commission to gather the facts on broadband deployment, it also ordered us to make a determination based on those facts. Specifically, based on our findings, the Commission must determine whether “advanced telecommunications capability” – broadband – is being deployed to all Americans in a “reasonable and timely fashion.” If the answer is negative, the law requires the FCC to “take immediate action” to speed deployment.

When Americans increasingly rely on broadband for job opportunities, healthcare, education, public safety, and civic participation, but nearly 34 million Americans couldn’t get high-speed fixed broadband even if they wanted it; when rural Americans are nearly ten times more likely than their urban peers to be bypassed by online opportunities; when 47 percent of our students don’t have sufficient bandwidth at school to use the latest digital learning tools, we cannot say that we are meeting the standard Congress set forth. We have a moral and statutory obligation to do better.

Consistent with this obligation, the Commission continues to take actions to close the digital divide in Rural America and on Tribal lands by incenting deployment of broadband in those areas, and bringing high-speed broadband to rural and Tribal schools and libraries. We are also adopting policies to promote broadband adoption and competition in the provision of broadband services.

Regarding the finding that advanced telecommunications capability requires access to both fixed and mobile broadband, we are not ready to establish a speed benchmark for mobile services as we have for fixed broadband service. Mobile speeds are inherently less consistent than fixed, and we will ask for more comment, and possibly consider new data, before we set a quality benchmark for an Internet access service where speeds are by nature less precise than fixed service speeds.

Moving forward, the Commission is fully committed to the goal of broadband for all, and we will take all reasonable measures to ensure that Americans have access to the networks that are increasingly essential for full participation in today's society and economy.

Thank you to our International, Public Safety and Homeland Security, Wireless Telecommunications and Wireline Competition Bureaus for their work on its item as well as our Office of Engineering and Technology and Office General Counsel. This was a broad-based effort that drew on the expertise of many within our Bureaus and Offices.