

Responses to Written Questions Submitted by Honorable Jerry Moran to Chip Strange

Question. As the Chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee with jurisdiction over the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), I have interest in seeing how NTIA could build upon the data collection of the FCC in its Form 477 process. More specifically, we have appropriated substantial resources in recent years to NTIA to broaden and update the National Broadband Map using their developed state partnerships. While NTIA has already announced its partnership with eight states to contribute data and other inputs into the map, would you agree that adding more state partnerships to contribute to the map would likely improve the overall accuracy of the map?

Response. Thank you, Senator Moran, for the question. Engaged stakeholders with broadband datasets and intimate knowledge of the unique demographic and topographic characteristics of their states can improve broadband mapping efforts. However, we should initially focus on states that have broadband data expertise, and not slow down NTIA's progress. More importantly, while adding more state data is a net positive, we must have methodological uniformity to ensure that the quality of the data, and ultimately the quality of the maps, is consistent across all states and territories. We do not want to repeat the mistakes of the State Broadband Initiative, which had widely varying approaches to determining if an area was served by broadband networks.

Fortunately, crowdsourced data collection and analytical capabilities, like those provided by Ookla, can fill in where granular information is lacking, while also serving as a data verification layer. I firmly believe that a multifaceted approach – which includes data from many parties with large datasets backed by strong data science and methodologies – will help ensure that you and other policymakers have the best information needed to efficiently and comprehensively expand broadband networks where needed.

The funding provided by Congress to NTIA to stand up a more accurate national broadband map is a good start and I appreciate your leadership in this area. We need to ensure that the agencies tasked with collecting and managing data are resourced appropriately. High quality broadband availability and performance datasets, and more importantly the downstream networks built using them, are vital to the economic and social prosperity of our nation.

Dedicated, annual recurring funding instruments are needed to ensure we consistently measure the state of broadband networks over time. One option is to stipulate that a percent of every taxpayer dollar used for broadband expansion will be dedicated to accurately measuring before we fund. This will help ensure we are better stewards of taxpayer money by building the right networks in the right places, while also not funding broadband expansion where privately funded networks already exist.