

Senator Cantwell Opening Statement
Full Committee Hearing
Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission
Wednesday, December 17, 2025
[\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, thank you for convening this important oversight hearing, and I thank our witnesses for being here.

The FCC independence is central to protecting [a] free and diverse press, strengthening our national security and bringing down the cost of telecommunications and media services. However, what we've seen this year and [the] costs that Americans are facing -- prices are rising. The question is, what is the Chairman of the FCC -- and the FCC -- doing to bring down costs for consumers? The American people deserve an FCC that protects them from hidden fees and promotes affordability. The FCC, though, is, in my mind, doing just the opposite in allowing consolidations that reduces competition and can help drive up costs. Americans are paying more than ever for streaming, cable, [and] wireless services. Streaming costs are up 13 percent this year alone. Basic cable costs have more than doubled in the last 10 years, and Americans are paying more than almost any other country for wireless. And what is the FCC doing to help drive down those costs?

Congress passed bipartisan legislation to ensure transparency in billing, but Chairman Carr has proposed to punch holes in those rules to implement that. He's making it easier for big corporations to tack on hidden fees to your internet bills. I've even heard consideration by some groups saying that we should take away spectrum from broadcast television stations, because maybe they're not getting enough use, and maybe we should have even less competition. So it's clear to me that the FCC needs to do everything [it can] to protect consumers, including protecting them from the harms of AI.

So instead, I see an FCC that is not focused enough on affordability. That is why today we are releasing a Snapshot Report from the minority...talking about why consolidation and reduced competition is driving up costs. So hopefully we can ask some questions about that today and focus on what we need to do to keep local journalism, to keep broadcasting and to make sure that we don't have undue influence.

We now know that this issue, as related to Jimmy Kimmel, "the easy way or the hard way," is just an example. And I certainly appreciate Chairman Cruz's words saying it was "dangerous as hell" and "right out of Goodfellas." But I also appreciate Leader Thune and former Majority Leader McConnell agreeing that this went too far.

The question is, how do we now make sure that we continue to have not so much consolidation? Because I know, Chairman Carr, you have supported consolidation that makes it easier to have influence and to have less competition. Local news and independent voices matter, and consolidation undermines that independence and drives up cost. What happens if a merger does take place and CBS and CNN are in the same boat? Are they going to continue to be the same competitive environment, or what will we do to make sure that consumers still have choice?

Earlier this year, Chairman Carr green lit the Skydance acquisition of Paramount, but not before Paramount agreed to pay \$16 million in a lawsuit. Using the FCC process should not be used in this kind of extortion process, but to focus on what will drive down costs and help consumers in this process. People across the political spectrum agree there's too much control in a few hands. Chris Ruddy, CEO of Newsmax, has spoken about how corporate consolidation threatens local news. Chairman Carr, what are we doing to make sure that you are going to continue to protect local media ownership and grow this opportunity. We do not want to see content that is produced nationally for local broadcast.

I'm right now suffering from an unbelievable flood that has gone on for days and days. Today's latest challenge will be a blizzard. They are wall-to-wall with news for the safety of the citizenry of Washington. I would hate to see broadcast content interrupted or a station undermined to the point that they can't do their job in covering this unbelievable flood which is affecting every corner, almost every corner, of our state.

But beyond bringing down costs and protecting independent media, I am also concerned about safety. Chinese intelligence orchestrated Salt Typhoon attacks, which then Senator Rubio, Vice Chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, described as, "The most disturbing and widespread incursion into our telecommunication system in the history of the world." That should have led the FCC to strengthen our defenses. Instead, Chairman Carr...you rolled back the FCC Salt Typhoon rules, the only major regulatory response to those attacks. And the rush to auction off critical spectrum, I believe, could undermine military readiness and aviation safety. Earlier this year, we wrote to Secretaries Duffy and Hegseth, outlining those concerns about safety.

So I hope that today's hearing can have the proper oversight on these important issues. What are we doing, not only to protect consumers from cost, but protect them on their safety and security? Mr. Chairman, it's an important time. Not all of these issues have happened in the last year, but clearly, we need to do our job in continuing to help the American consumer get information in a competitive landscape and also drive down costs.

I thank the Chairman. Look forward to hearing from the witnesses.

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Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

Chairman Carr, obviously, Salt Typhoon was a major attack on the United States' infrastructure - government espionage by them, specifically exploiting the wiretap system built by law enforcement to track millions of Americans -- their location real time, phone calls, text messages -- and, according to senior officials, breached largely because the telecom companies didn't implement basic cybersecurity measures like...putting a patch in place or router vulnerabilities. At the beginning of the year, the FCC issued a ruling to hold the companies accountable, but the FCC rolled that back last month. So, are these Chinese hackers still in the American telecom system?

Chairman Carr: Thank you, Senator for the question. I agree with you that the Salt Typhoon incident should never have been allowed to happen. At the beginning of the year, the Biden Administration put forward a declaratory ruling, but no rules themselves were adopted at the time, and the FCC decision itself didn't go through the agency's normal review process. When I spoke with the career intel officials then, they were urging me not to move forward with a rulemaking, but instead to work collaboratively and directly with the carriers to make sure they were taking real-time actions to address and remediate. In fact, that's what we've been doing. We've worked directly with the carriers...

Sen. Cantwell: Do you think there are still hackers in the system?

Chairman Carr: Well, recently, over the summer, the FBI Cyber Director, I'll refer you to his remarks that are very specific on this. And the Cyber Director for the FBI said that the hackers behind Salt Typhoon are "largely contained" and "dormant in the networks, that they're not actively infiltrating information." So, I'd again refer you to sort of the FBI, which is the lead spokesperson on this issue, but we've done...

Sen. Cantwell: I mean, I know what the FBI and CISA recommended. They said that you should use Signal. That everybody in America should get off of these systems and use other messaging services that had encrypted calling. So, I don't think this issue is solved. And I think rolling back the rules that protect Americans -- I think in this information age, you need to have robust, robust security measures, and you need to make sure that the telecom industry is implementing them. Otherwise, we will continue to have these kind of hacks on the system. And so I don't agree with the rolling back of these [rules].

I do want to bring up a second issue, which is on cost. And Ms. Gomez, you articulated this as it related to EchoStar DISH, I think. But I think it's bigger than that. We're seeing this massive amount of consolidation in the marketplace. I think we have a chart back here -- somebody could just hold it up for a second -- about how, you know, we pay the most in wireless costs. And so,

the question is, what are we going to do to drive down costs for consumers, and how are these consolidations basically making it more challenging for us to give consumers real choice in the marketplace without cost?

And while I love spectrum and I want good international competition, I'm more impressed with spectrum that doesn't interfere with DOD. I'm more impressed with spectrum that basically helps expand into rural areas and drives down costs, and more impressed with a spectrum policy that basically takes that low end of the market that doesn't have affordable costs and basically does something to help them participate in the market.

Why give more spectrum if the telecom companies [flout] and decide not to do the rules on security, and they just become basically richer, while the American consumer becomes poorer? And again, this is just one example of how the United States is one of the most expensive in the [world]. But could you help explain a little more on your thoughts about what we do to increase competition and lower costs?

Commissioner Gomez: Thank you, Senator. I'm a firm believer that robust competition results in benefits for consumers, including lower costs, and I am concerned that the level of consolidation in this country is actually reducing the incentives that lead to lower costs for consumers. And since you raised affordability, I'm so glad you raised that, because one of the things that I'm very concerned about is the lack of a program to provide affordable access to connectivity for consumers throughout this country. We are spending billions of dollars in order to deploy networks in the hardest to reach areas, but we're not going to make sure that they are sustainable if people can't afford to actually purchase that service.

Sen. Cantwell: Isn't that what's been wrong with spectrum policy writ large, is we just -- we sell the spectrum, we give it to the telco industry, they basically expand to the areas that they can have customers, but not to the hard to serve areas or get figuring out a price point that will allow them to deliver a service so we can expand to the whatever it is, 20 million Americans that don't have broadband.

Commissioner Gomez: Yes, that's exactly right. I mean, it's an incentive. Your economic incentive is where the profits are, so that's where government steps in.

Sen. Cantwell: Well, I don't think that's where the FCC is stepping in. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.