SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

Full Committee
Nomination Hearing
Tuesday, November 10, 2026, at 10:30 A.M.

REPUBLICAN QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

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COVER PAGE

SENATOR JOHN THUNE (R-SD)

Question 1. The Universal Service Fund's high cost program provides support to many of South Dakota's telecom providers. What steps is the FCC taking to strengthen the high cost program and ensure that local telecom providers who are investing in their home states have the certainty they need from the program to connect unserved areas in rural America?

The FCC's High-Cost program has played an important role in making sure that Americans in rural, remote, and other high cost areas have access to robust broadband services. The FCC has an open proceeding exploring ways to modernize the program and ensure support is being efficiently used. As the agency evaluates the record in response to its NPRM, I think that its priorities should be predictability, sustainability, and efficiency. Funding should be predictable to ensure providers can plan their network upgrades and investments accordingly. Program policies should also focus on the longer-term sustainability of USF. And making sure that limited taxpayer dollars are being efficiently used by protecting against waste, fraud, and abuse, will allow them to go further towards their intended purpose.

Question 2. Will you commit to working with Congress on legislative reforms to the Universal Service fund and ensure this critical program continues?

Yes, I would welcome the opportunity to work with Congress on legislative reforms to the Universal Service Fund and ensure this critical program continues.

Question 3. What steps have the FCC already taken or can take to address waste, fraud, and abuse and improve efficiency across Universal Service Fund programs?

Protecting USF against waste, fraud, and abuse must continue to be a top FCC priority. As part of a broader top-to-bottom review, the FCC has opened rulemakings exploring reforms of all four of its USF programs. It has also opened a rulemaking aimed at reforming USAC with an eye towards reducing burdens, creating efficiencies, and eliminating duplicative or lengthy reviews. The Commission has also taken steps to strengthen oversight through audits, eligibility verifications, and improved coordination with its federal partners and USAC.

Question 4. The nation's telecom infrastructure workforce plays a vital role in connecting communities across America. What steps can the FCC take to address workforce issues?

A skilled telecom workforce is critical to maintaining 5G leadership and building the foundation for 6G. The FCC should continue working with industry, other agencies, and educational institutions to identify workforce needs and shortages and find ways to expand training programs. The FCC should also continue to streamline its rules and eliminate barriers to deployment so that providers are able to move projects forward more quickly, creating greater demand for a skilled workforce.

Question 5. The historic Working Families Tax Cuts Act mandated the auction of 800 megahertz of spectrum. I have long been an advocate of expanding access to both licensed and

unlicensed spectrum. Do you share this same commitment to ensuring access to ample licensed and unlicensed spectrum continues to ensure American innovation can prosper in the future?

Yes. Access to a healthy mix of licensed and unlicensed spectrum will be critical to America's long-term economic prosperity and national security.

Question 6. The FCC National Broadband Map illustrates where fixed broadband service is provided, or could be provided, across the country and what broadband services are available to these locations. Providers have reported difficulties with the challenge process, and I introduced the Broadband MAP Act with Senators Fetterman and Fischer to address these issues. If confirmed, how will you work to address the outstanding issues with the challenge process?

If confirmed, I would work with FCC staff to ensure that the FCC's challenge processes are easy for providers to use and help to facilitate accurate, granular maps. The FCC currently has an open rulemaking seeking comment on ways we can improve and simplify the challenge processes, including questions on how we can improve help center and other technical assistance resources to encourage greater participation in the challenge process. I would be glad to work with you or your staff on this issue as we work towards an order in that proceeding.

SENATOR TODD YOUNG (R-IN)

1. The subsea cable infrastructure serves as the backbone to the world's communication systems; and earlier this year, we learned just how frequently our adversaries seek to disrupt communications by illegally cutting this infrastructure. We must do whatever we can to address this threat by making our infrastructure more resilient and increasing the deployment of new cables. This will continue to be a slow and potentially ineffective process if we are unable to better streamline the regulatory process.

    - In your experience, are there any other areas that should be a focus for strengthening resiliency of our subsea cable infrastructure, especially as our adversaries continue to advance tactics to disrupt it? And do you have any recommendations to address the potential weaknesses that our adversaries look to take advantage of? **The security and resiliency of subsea cables is paramount. The FCC should be routinely working with cable operators to identify any vulnerabilities and ensure there are appropriate protections in place. We should also encourage greater diversity and redundancy in routes, including by making deployment easier as the FCC has been doing through some of its open proceedings.**
    - What deterrents should we be considering to prevent adversaries from cutting cables in the first place? **One additional way to prevent cable cuts would be for the United States to increase its monitoring efforts. We should also make clear that intentional damage to these cables is unacceptable and carries consequences.**
    - How should the U.S. work with allies and partners on establishing or reaffirming international norms in the subsea cables space? **I agree that international norms are incredibly helpful and can be achieved through increased coordination. As noted above, first, I think that the United States should work with its allies and partners to make clear to other countries that intentional damage comes with consequences. Second, we should work with our allies and partners to facilitate greater information sharing, including the sharing of information about suspicious activity. Third, we should continue to facilitate coordinated incident response. And finally, we should promote improved cooperation when cable repairs are necessary.**
    - Are there additional areas where interagency coordination can be improved with respect to subsea cables? Are there any areas where legislation would be helpful? **Interagency coordination will continue to be important. If confirmed, I would be glad to work with you and your staff to identify areas where additional legislative authority would be helpful.**

2. The transition to all-IP networks presents an important opportunity to modernize our nation's communications infrastructure. How can the FCC help ensure that this transition advances our national security interests, including by strengthening network resiliency, reducing vulnerabilities that foreign adversaries could exploit, and ensuring that our communications infrastructure is secure and reliable?

Outdated, aging copper facilities have increasingly posed reliability and resiliency challenges, including the risk of widespread outages. By making it easier to retire these networks, the FCC has been encouraging providers to redirect resources towards the

deployment of modern IP-based networks that can better withstand cyber threats, natural disasters, and other disruptions. The FCC should continue to identify ways to facilitate this transition and reduce the number of vulnerabilities that exist in our networks, including in our critical infrastructure.

3. Section 253 is supposed to prevent state and local governments from putting up unnecessary roadblocks to broadband deployment. But providers still run into permitting delays and inconsistent requirements when they attempt to build out fiber networks, particularly when it comes to infrastructure like fiber huts that are often located outside traditional public rights-of-way. In your view, does the FCC have the authority under Section 253 to address these kinds of barriers? And should the Commission extend the same permitting shot clocks and reasonable fee limitations that apply to rights-of-way access to fiber huts and other infrastructure outside those rights-of-way?

The FCC must continue to identify ways to make it easier for providers to deploy necessary broadband infrastructure. Section 253 gives the FCC an important tool to ensure that state and local requirements are not inhibiting the deployment of telecommunications services. The FCC has open proceedings looking at permitting delays, excessive fees, and other requirements that are slowing down projects. The FCC's wireline proceeding also looks at whether Section 253 extends to fiber huts and other supporting facilities that are necessary for operating modern fiber networks inside and outside of the rights-of-way. While the FCC's proceeding remains open, clear direction from Congress regarding these builds would provide the clarity necessary to providers across the country.

SENATOR JOHN CURTIS (R-UT)

1. Utah is home to the most certified Dark Sky Places in the world, including our Mighty Five national parks. These areas drive the economy of our rural communities, and state and local governments have invested significantly in preserving and using them. At the same time, I understand that more satellites are required for our modern communications needs.

- As these satellites are deployed, how can the FCC mitigate concerns about growing satellite visibility in dark skies so that industry can grow without negatively impacting recreational and scientific stargazing? **It is very important that the FCC and its federal partners balance the dual goals of preserving our dark skies and promoting a robust satellite market that can accommodate a growing demand for communications services. If confirmed, I would be glad to work with you or your staff on this issue to identify specific ways the FCC can mitigate concerns.**

2. The Commission's various reports on deployment to voice and broadband services throughout the nation consistently show our Tribal lands, especially rural Tribal lands, lagging in both broadband availability and affordability.[1]

[1] https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-26-55A1.pdf (Fig. 1, 2, 5, 8, 9).

- Do you agree that the Commission must do more to ensure that citizens living on rural Tribal lands have access to reasonably comparable broadband, both in quality and price, compared to our nation's urban/suburban areas? **Yes, citizens living on rural Tribal lands should have access to reasonably comparable broadband, both in quality and price.**
- Do you agree that one of the biggest impediments to broadband access on remote Tribal lands is insufficient universal service support to carriers attempting to build, operate, and upgrade networks on those lands?
  I believe insufficient support could be an impediment to deployment in extremely remote areas such as Tribal lands. But there may be other significant impediments, including the cost of deployment due to terrain, spectrum availability, and even a lack of demand.