

OPENING STATEMENT

RANKING MEMBER EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON [D-TX]

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Good afternoon. I'd like to join Chairman Hall in welcoming our witnesses to today's hearing.

There is no question that the Global Positioning System (GPS) has transformed our economy and our society in many ways. It has been an amazing accomplishment. Some here may be surprised to learn that this very successful program is a government initiative.

The Global Positioning System was established by the Department of Defense to support their national security mission needs, but civilian agencies also rely on GPS to provide greater services to the American public. There is no doubt that GPS plays an essential role in public safety.

This hearing will allow Members to better appreciate how our agencies use GPS as well as what would be lost without GPS.

GPS satellite signals have also spawned an entire area of innovation in private industry with new hardware and applications that allow the average citizen unprecedented tools for location and navigation.

All of this has been a free benefit to the nation's economy that is the product of sound management of the radio spectrum and direct government investment.

The LightSquared proposal to build a nationwide broadband network in the frequencies that sit next to GPS has provoked enormous controversy. I believe that if there is no way for LightSquared to move forward without damaging GPS, then the FCC should not approve the company's proposal.

However, I do not believe that the FCC would make a decision that compromises GPS services. The question the Commission has to settle, and the question that this hearing will not allow us to make much headway on, is whether GPS can thrive side-by-side with a ground-based broadband network. I sincerely hope that they can coexist.

Some of those supporting the GPS industry claim such coexistence is impossible. They suggest the physics of cell towers sending out powerful transmissions would overwhelm sensitive GPS receivers.

However, others argue that this is not a physics problem, but an engineering challenge. With filters for GPS units and with reasonable beam-shaping at cell towers, smart engineering can solve these problems.

I do not know whether we are dealing with a physics problem or an engineering challenge, but I am not convinced any of the witnesses can today provide an answer to that question with absolute certainty.

The agencies before us are testifying based on testing of GPS equipment under the original LightSquared proposal in which the company would first build cell towers that broadcast in the portion of the spectrum immediately adjacent to that of GPS. That testing was not based on the new proposal from the company to use the portion of their spectrum that is most remote from GPS's assigned frequencies.

I fully believe that the FCC will make its decisions based on technical assessments and not the political pressure that may come from private parties, or even from Committees of Congress or the Executive. I hope to learn as much as I can today about what additional testing may be needed to inform the FCC's processes.

The core question for policy-makers is this: can we use the L-band, or some portion of it, of the radio spectrum for an earth-based broadband network without damaging GPS?

I hope that the answer is yes, and everyone here should hope the answer is yes, because we need more broadband just as we need GPS.

LightSquared is saying that they intend to invest \$14 billion over the next 8 years to build out their network, employing 15,000 people a year in the process.

In building more information technology infrastructure, consumers would have more choice in their telecommunications and data services with lower costs and expanding access.

We should also see accelerating innovation in data-intensive cellular applications that take advantage of the greater capacities of this new network—creating more jobs, more profits, and more growth in high tech industries. And we desperately need jobs, profits and growth right now.

While I am skeptical that today we will get definitive answers to the most important policy questions, I look forward to listening to the testimony, and I thank the witnesses for their participation.