

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (2011 225-2927)

Minority (2011 225-3641)

October 11, 2011

12-0025

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

With the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Congress directed the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to develop a National Broadband Plan (NBP).¹ Congress required that the NBP include a detailed analysis of the most effective mechanisms for ensuring broadband access, a strategy for achieving affordable broadband, an evaluation of the status of broadband deployment, and a plan for advancing broadband use in relation to a variety of national purposes, such as public safety, health care delivery, energy independence, and education.

On March 16, 2010, the FCC released the NBP with an analysis of the state of broadband deployment and adoption in the United States. The NBP put forth a number of recommendations, including actions the FCC should take, to move toward the goals outlined by Congress. We ask that the Government Accountability Office conduct a review of the NBP and determine what the FCC has accomplished thus far and how it plans to implement further the recommendations in the NBP.

We specifically request that you examine the FCC's progress in addressing the following topics contained in the National Broadband Plan:

1. *Development of Broadband Performance Standards:* Please evaluate the level of information available to consumers, industry groups, and the federal government regarding broadband service quality and metrics. In evaluating this information, please specify what, if any, additional disclosure requirements would be needed to measure performance and whether the FCC is taking action to provide such information to the public.

¹ The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Pub. L. No. 111-5 (2009).

2. *Enhanced Spectrum Management:* The NBP recommended that the FCC and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) should work to develop a more comprehensive spectrum management system and create tools to measure spectrum utilization by existing licensees. Please provide details about FCC and NTIA progress towards implementing this recommendation. If appropriate, identify additional steps the FCC and NTIA might consider.
3. *Universal Service Fund Utilization:* The NBP suggested that the FCC repurpose universal service funding to promote broadband deployment to the millions of homes that do not have access to this critical service. Please assess FCC efforts to implement this recommendation and provide details regarding the potential effectiveness of the FCC's approach.
4. *Public-Private Partnerships to Deploy Broadband Infrastructure in High-Cost Areas:* The NBP also suggested that the FCC examine economic, regulatory and policy barriers to the deployment of municipal broadband networks as well as assess public-private broadband partnerships that have been successful in the United States and globally. Please provide an update regarding FCC progress in this area.
5. *Increasing Broadband Adoption and Utilization:* The NBP suggests that the FCC and the NTIA adopt measures to lower barriers to broadband adoption for low-income households. These measures include expansion of the Lifeline and Link-Up programs, the creation of public-private partnerships to improve broadband adoption, and addressing issues of accessibility for seniors, tribal lands, and people with disabilities. Please provide an update regarding the status of these recommendations.

We also request that GAO inform the Committee regarding any other issues of concern that it may uncover during its examination of the FCC's implementation of the National Broadband Plan.

Thank you for your attention to this request. If you have any questions about, please have your staff contact Roger Sherman at 202-225-3641.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy
and Commerce



Anna G. Eshoo
Ranking Member
Telecommunications
and Technology Subcommittee



Edward J. Markey
Member
Committee on Energy
and Commerce