

**Remarks of USTelecom President & CEO Jonathan Spalter
To the Connected America Conference
Dallas, TX — April 14, 2026**

Good morning, I am Jonathan Spalter. I am really happy to be back in Texas. I want to start with a big shout-out to all my friends here today who are part of our USTelecom community. It is great to see you.

Also, a big thank you to every one of you for the hard work you do, the risks you take, the massive investments you make to connect our families, our neighbors, our communities.

I want to talk to you today about the important policy work happening in Washington and across the country, but also about America's Connected Future as a defining choice. Do we have the guts and the vision to embrace and lead the next frontier of technological progress?

There is a scene that plays out in every generation and every civilization that has ever stood at the edge of something new:

- Someone builds a printing press; the scribes say: who will buy our manuscripts?

- Someone strings telegraph wire across a continent; Pony Express riders ask: what will become of our routes?
- A supercomputer arrives in every pocket, and entire industries scramble to reinvent.

We've seen this movie before. What strikes me every time is the skeptics' certainty that preserving the past is somehow progress.

The song remains the same — but the pace is accelerating. The printing press took a century to transform European society. The telegraph, decades. The internet, a generation. Artificial intelligence...how long does it take to press refresh?

In this moment, disruption doesn't politely knock. By the time we see it coming, many are already in its rearview mirror.

Every year, USTelecom does a rolling tally. At last count: broadband companies have invested \$2.2 trillion since 1996 in ever stronger, faster, more secure and resilient networks — nearly \$90 billion last year alone. That's more than TWICE what our government spent to build the interstate highway system ...put a man on the moon...and sling four Americans back around it just days ago... combined.

We all cheered the Artemis splashdown. It was a spectacular American moment. But no investment in U.S. history has touched more lives than the one being built by the people in this room. ¹ Our investment literally is the backhaul of the modern American economy. Yet too often, it's taken for granted.

Take the shiny object of the moment: AI. There are debates underway about guardrails – and they matter. What's not up for debate? AI runs on infrastructure — *this* industry's infrastructure. Without your broadband networks, those hyper-scaling data centers would be nothing more than big, expensive refrigerators.

Yet here is the fundamental challenge: Broadband networks and the innovation they make possible have raced ahead. Yet the laws and mindsets governing them too often remain frozen in amber.

Think of this: The regulatory operating system that still lords over— much of our industry just celebrated its 30th year...birthed when Amazon started selling books, DVDs were a thing, and the definition of broadband was 200 kilobits per second (making AOL's honk and screech our society's Muzak).

The '96 Telecom Act and so many rules still on the books are rooted in a bygone world ... one company, one wire, one choice ... gaslighting consumers' lived experience of a world of options in their pockets, their homes, even beaming down from the sky.

Technology is transforming our world. And we are all feeling the competition. Consumers have overwhelmingly embraced this change for what it is — progress.

Yet, as one example, we're still debating what to do with outdated copper networks.

Here are the facts:

- Four out of five Americans are now wireless-only for voice service.
- For those who still choose home phones, nearly 80 percent choose VOIP.
- Less than 1.3 percent of Americans rely solely on aging copper networks to “reach out and touch someone.”

Yet in many parts of our country, the rules continue to insist broadband companies spend billions each year maintaining networks consumers have all but abandoned.

...all in the name of “progress.”

But I come bearing good news.

Last month, the FCC took a landmark step — adopting a clear, responsible framework to accelerate the transition to modern digital networks.

And the FCC’s decision was unanimous. In a Washington that can’t agree on the time of day, commissioners — across party lines — looked at the facts and reached the same conclusion: it’s time to move forward.

It’s not just the FCC answering the call. The day before the Commission’s vote, the Supreme Court also ruled unanimously — nine to zero — that internet providers would not be held liable for billions of dollars just for providing access to the internet.

USTelecom was on the barricades through our copyright coalition, which includes your next speaker. Cable and telecom may be fierce competitors in the marketplace, but we are shoulder to shoulder in this fight.

The FCC. The Supreme Court. Unanimous agreement. That's not politics. That's consensus.

And, these decisions affect all of us. Our nation is at war. When our team's in a SCIF with homeland security ... all of us wearing Team USA jerseys ... racing in real time to protect our country from cyber threats ... I can assure you no one is reaching for a 30-year-old playbook. Speed matters. Agility matters. We need policies that protect and advance our people and our nation in *this* world.

Add to the mix the BEAD funding now rolling out to connect the final frontier. This, too, can be a transformational moment...IF we let it.

These funds come with a shot clock. Providers have four years to build and deliver.

The single greatest threat to meeting that deadline is not technology. Not capital. Not willpower. It's paperwork. It's permitting.

We all know the story: Crews hired. Equipment staged. Investment committed. Then projects vanish into permitting purgatory. Months.... sometimes years...waiting just to *repair* an existing line on federal land.

The problem is almost never rejection. It's delay — death by a thousand paper cuts.

So, we're pushing hard for reform - driving three principles with everything we've got.

First: Cut duplication. Where infrastructure already exists, don't study the same ground twice. Good news here: The White House just this week advanced exactly this guidance to federal agencies. We worked hard behind the scenes for a year to get this over the finish line.

Second: Shot clocks on federal lands. 30 days. If there's no decision — then **that's** the decision. We move forward.

Third: End the gridlock. Where delays are unreasonable or unsolvable, there must be a way to keep building.

More green lights. Less red tape.

Real world context matters. Don't doubt for a second: The folks in Beijing would love to see American bureaucracy grind our progress to a halt.

Our nation committed the resources to meet this moment. We cannot let outdated processes be the reason we don't. The most dangerous mindset to progress is the insistence that the way things have always been is the way they must always be.

That's why USTelecom members have banded together to launch something new. We call it America's Connected Future...add dot org and you can find us online.

It is a campaign and an invitation — to every company, every community leader, every lawmaker who understands that what's at stake here is not a telecom priority, but an American one.

Whether our country can stand united for progress, for economic growth, for security, for innovation — for our continued global leadership.

We need you on the barricades with us. As proud as I am of USTelecom's work, our secret weapon is all of you.

You are trusted voices in your communities. You sit on hospital and school boards ... chambers of commerce. You cheer alongside your customers from the sidelines and bleachers because your kids play on the same teams.

Our industry is more than 600,000 strong...living and working in every community. Your voices matter. The most important thing we can do to advance America's Connected Future is for the people building these networks to talk not just to each other but to everyone else ... telling and retelling your stories ... about the schools and hospitals, businesses and homes you are connecting...making clear – in your communities, in your statehouses -- that the defining choice before us is not about any one industry or company. It's whether the people who write the rules It's whether the people who write the rules can move as fast as the innovators who build our networks, and the ever-scaling

connectivity needs of millions of American communities and businesses they support.

And, what's at stake for all of us if they can't.

Over and over, I urge you to ask one simple question: if we can build it, why can't government clear the way?

[PAUSE]

The people who built this industry guided America through every major technological shift. Each faced the voices that said not now, not yet.

Every time, we moved forward.

Now, it's our turn to do what our country has always done when the stakes are highest: We build. We connect. We **make** the defining choice to move forward. That is the American story, and it's yours to write next. I am proud to stand with you. Proud to carry this fight to Washington and proud to represent this great American industry.

Let's get to work. Thank you.

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