

Oral Testimony of
USTelecom President & CEO Jonathan Spalter
Senate Commerce Subcommittee
on Telecommunications and Media

July 30, 2026

Chair Fischer, Ranking Member Luján, subcommittee members, a few weeks ago I had a great chance to go up to the rafters of the Capitol dome and see the extraordinary fresco painted by Constantino Brumidi.

Depicted there...I couldn't believe it...is the goddess Venus helping lay the first transatlantic telegraph cable. The scene was painted in 1865 as that cable was being laid. The Civil War was ending, and a visionary Congress believed the future of our country ran through communications infrastructure. They were right then, and you are right now to expand that dialogue in this current moment.

With AI, we are at the cusp of the next fundamental evolution of the internet. For thirty years, the internet we have come to know was built like a freeway with eight lanes into town and two lanes out. This made sense in a world where traffic flowed overwhelmingly in a single direction, which is DOWN to customers. That asymmetric design was based on the assumption we humans and our devices would always receive far more

data than we send – as we all go home to catch up on Love Island and play Roblox.

AI shatters that assumption.

Now the machines and sensors all around us require massive capacity to carry data both upstream and down, which fiber broadband is uniquely suited to do.

Other technologies are working to expand their upstream capacity. Fiber doesn't have to. It was built for this era, with near limitless capacity in both directions. This is why satellite, wireless, WiFi hand off their traffic to fiber, as quickly as they can, to take advantage of its massive capacity.

For this reason, fiber broadband is the circulatory system of our AI-enabled innovation economy.

Thus, the biggest barrier to getting AI-ready connectivity to every community is not technology...investment or our will. It is government, specifically permitting – waiting months, even years – for permission to connect more communities to broadband.

So our asks today are simple.

- Pass the CLOSE THE GAP Act...the RAIL Act...and the ABPA so we can get our shovels in the ground and connect your communities to make sure they are part of our AI future.

- Keep spectrum flowing. Fiber is the backbone; spectrum enables that last wireless leap. The two must advance together.
- And, reauthorize CISA 2015, so we can continue to secure these next great innovations and the networks that support them.

I have said before that data centers are nothing but expensive refrigerators without fiber broadband. Without permitting reform, our whole innovation economy risks being put on ice.

And, nowhere more so than in rural America. The communities that need us most are those where your action can make the biggest difference.

In 1865, Congress looked at a single telegraph cable on the ocean floor and saw the American future. We were optimists then, and we must be optimists now...with a healthy dose of pragmatism, as well.

The question before us as a society is not do we stop or continue; it is the question always posed by innovation: how do we proceed responsibly, in ways that most fully benefit everyone.

That is the task before us. America's broadband providers look forward to working with you. On behalf of all USTelecom member companies, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I look forward to your questions.

