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Congress Explores Benefits Of Digital Equity And Internet Adoption In U.S.



Jason Brett Contributor 

Crypto & Blockchain

I write about blockchain regulation and policy.

At 10:30am ET today, the House Energy Subcommittee On Communications and Technology will explore how communities can be empowered and connected through Digital Equity and Internet Adoption.

DEMOCRATS, ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE

Hearing on "Empowering and Connecting Communities through Digital Equity and Internet Adoption"

Witnesses will include Angela Siefer, Executive Director, National Digital Inclusion Alliance; Joshua Edmonds, Director of Digital Inclusion, City of Detroit, Michigan; Gigi Sohn, Distinguished Fellow, Georgetown Law Institute for Technology Law and Policy; Jeffrey R. Sural, Director, Broadband Infrastructure, Office North Carolina Department of Information Technology; and Roslyn Layton, Visiting Scholar American Enterprise Institute.



In this May 8, 2019, photograph, Graham Stidham, center, asks his father, East Webster High School ...
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The Committee provides an overview of the hearing and starts by describing what ‘Digital Equity’ means. ‘Digital Equity’ is a condition in which ‘all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy.’ In terms of unconnected households, the lack of internet access at home poses difficulties especially for students expected to complete homework away from school. Described as the ‘homework gap’, students may have to spend evenings at school, libraries, or in restaurants to access the internet.

In terms of the barriers to Broadband adoption, the Committee notes many individuals lack digital literacy or ‘the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.’ According to a Pew Research Study, more than half of Americans are reluctant to use broadband technology, which when combined with the increased requirements of employers to apply online, creates further obstacles for gainful employment.

Regarding the obstacle of affordability, over 51% of Americans note that home internet would be purchased if it was less expensive. While some services offer ‘affordable connectivity’, the speed is too slow to qualify as connected to broadband. Research shows a cost between \$10-\$15 a month for Internet would increase the level of Internet usage by American households.

Finally, it appears there is a significant number of Americans using smartphones for connectivity, and that these devices are a) used more often by persons of color from lower-income households. Using a smartphone makes it more difficult to use to complete homework or apply for a job than a laptop or desktop computer with Internet connectivity.

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Jason Brett

I am a former U.S. Regulator with the FDIC, compliance examiner for the Making Home Affordable Program (HAMP) with the Treasury, and have been active in bitcoin and...

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