$42B broadband grant program may scrap Biden admin's preference for fiber

Republicans and ISPs have objected to the NTIA's enforcement of the legal mandate that Internet providers receiving federal funds offer at least one "low-cost broadband service option for eligible subscribers." Although this requirement is part of the law that created BEAD, Republicans and ISPs say the Biden NTIA went too far when it urged states to set a fixed rate of $30 per month for the low-cost service option.

At the Federalist Society event, Roth said that "requiring states to choose a state-wide, low-income rate is just one of the ways they've imposed extralegal requirements. There's also climate change regs, union mandates, wholesale access requirements… all kinds of left-wing priorities on the program that divert resources away from the overall goal of closing broadband gaps. This is going to make the program less cost effective and it's going to undermine its goals."

Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr, who repeatedly criticized the Biden NTIA's handling of BEAD, said that Roth "will be a terrific leader at NTIA." Roth worked for the FCC during the first Trump administration as a legal adviser in the Wireline Competition Bureau, and later a wireline adviser for Republican FCC Commissioner Michael O'Rielly.

Industry lobby groups want

different rules

In the law that created BEAD, Congress defined priority broadband projects as those that "ensure that the network built by the project can easily scale speeds over time to meet the evolving connectivity needs of households and businesses; and support the deployment of 5G, successor wireless technologies, and other advanced services."

The Biden NTIA concluded that end-to-end fiber-optic architecture is the only technology that achieves those goals. "End-to-end fiber networks can be updated by replacing equipment attached to the ends of the fiber-optic facilities, allowing for quick and relatively inexpensive network scaling as compared to other technologies. Moreover, new fiber deployments will facilitate the deployment and growth of 5G and other advanced wireless services, which rely extensively on fiber for essential backhaul," the Biden NTIA said.

Lobby groups for non-fiber ISPs hope that decision will be reversed, and they welcomed Roth's nomination. "We look forward to working with Arielle as she takes the reins at NTIA, especially to help put the BEAD program on a better and more successful course," said America's Communications Association, a cable lobby group.

The Wireless Internet Service Providers Association said that "Roth's work with Senator Ted Cruz on BEAD is especially encouraging, illuminating a path to correct that off-track program." The group said the program's funding decisions should be "tech-neutral" so that fixed wireless ISPs have a better chance of obtaining grants.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/02/trump-picks-ted-cruzs-telecom-chief-to-overhaul-42b-broadband-program/