

DEPLOYING INFRASTRUCTURE WITH GREATER INTERNET
TRANSACTIONS AND LEGACY APPLICATIONS ACT

FEBRUARY 4, 2026.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State
of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. WESTERMAN, from the Committee on Natural Resources,
submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H.R. 1665]

The Committee on Natural Resources, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 1665) to require the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture to establish online portals to accept, process, and dispose of certain Form 299s, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon without amendment and recommends that the bill do pass.

PURPOSE OF THE LEGISLATION

The purpose of H.R. 1665 is to require the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture to establish online portals to accept, process, and dispose of certain Form 299s, and for other purposes.

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

An affordable and reliable connection to high-speed internet, or broadband, is vital to many aspects of modern life.¹ Broadband access requires the support of various technologies, including cable, telephone wire, fiber, satellite, and mobile and fixed wireless transmitters.² From online education to telemedicine and ecommerce, essential activities, experiences, and interactions increasingly occur online.³ For large segments of the population, however, the transi-

¹Colby Leigh Rachfal, “The Digital Divide: What Is It, Where Is It, and Federal Assistance Programs,” Congressional Research Service, March 9, 2021, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46613>.

²*Id.*

³*Id.*

tion into the digital world remains elusive.⁴ Deploying broadband technology in rural areas presents challenges, due to lower population densities, vast distances, and rugged topography.⁵ To reach rural and tribal areas, much of this infrastructure must be installed on federal land.⁶ However, broadband providers must endure burdensome permitting requirements and application processes imposed by federal, state, and local governments.⁷ These regulatory hurdles raise the costs of, and bring delay and uncertainty to, broadband development plans.⁸ As a result, rural and tribal areas “tend to lag behind urban and suburban areas in broadband deployment and the speed of service offered.”⁹ This discrepancy in broadband accessibility is so pronounced it is now broadly known as the “digital divide.”¹⁰

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) process the most applications and communications use authorizations to install communications facilities on federal property.¹¹ Communications use authorizations are requests for easements, rights-of-way, leases, or other authorizations “to locate or modify a transmitting device, support structure, or other communications facility” on public lands.¹² USFS manages over 1,400 communications sites and administers more than 4,000 communications use authorizations on national forests and grasslands.¹³ Communications facilities support over 10,000 “wireless uses” for governments, utility companies, private businesses, and individuals.¹⁴ Similarly, on public lands, BLM administers more than 1,500 communications sites and has authorized the installation and operation of more than 4,000 additional communications facilities.¹⁵

Despite these figures, the Department of the Interior (DOI) and USFS impose formidable regulatory barriers to broadband deployment.¹⁶ Before they can construct or operate the necessary facilities on federal land, broadband providers must typically participate in a pre-application meeting, complete the Standard Form 299 application materials, and undergo extensive review periods.¹⁷ The agencies face a statutory requirement to grant or deny these applications within 270 days.¹⁸ In practice, however, this process can be

⁴*Id.*

⁵*Id.*

⁶“Special Uses—Communications Uses,” U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/special-uses/communications-uses>. Streamlining Federal Siting Working Group Final Report, FCC Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee, January 24, 2018, <https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/bdac-federalsiting-01232018.pdf>.

⁷Streamlining Federal Siting Working Group Final Report, FCC Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee, January 24, 2018, <https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/bdac-federalsiting-01232018.pdf>.

⁸*Id.*

⁹*Id.*

¹⁰*Id.*

¹¹“Broadband Deployment: Agencies Should Take Steps to Better Meet Deadline for Processing Permits,” U.S. Government Accountability Office, April 10, 2024, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-106157#>.

¹²*Id.*

¹³“Communication Uses—Wireless Uses,” U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/special-uses/communications-uses/wireless-uses>.

¹⁴*Id.*

¹⁵“Communications Sites,” U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, <https://www.blm.gov/programs/lands-and-realty/communication-sites>.

¹⁶Streamlining Federal Siting Working Group Final Report, FCC Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee, January 24, 2018, <https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/bdac-federalsiting-01232018.pdf>.

¹⁷*Id.*

¹⁸*Id.*

much lengthier. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently reported that roughly half of the communications use applications submitted to the BLM and USFS from fiscal year (FY) 2018 to FY 2022 either exceeded the 270-day deadline or lacked sufficient data to conclude whether the deadline had been met.¹⁹ Broadband developers report that fiber deployment in rural areas takes, on average, between five to ten years to complete.²⁰ These lengthy wait times dissuade many would-be-providers from even applying in the first place. Without lowering these obstacles, the “digital divide,” and its harmful consequences, will persist.

H.R. 1665 addresses these challenges by advancing broadband deployment in rural and Tribal areas. Specifically, the bill would require DOI and USFS to establish online portals for processing Standard Form 299s for communications use authorizations. The legislation also requires DOI and USFS to notify the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) within three business days of establishing their respective portals.²¹ After this period, NTIA must create links to those portals from its own website.²² Together, these provisions create an online, “one-stop-shop” for applicants to apply for communications use authorizations from federal land managers.²³ In the process, the bill promises to bring transparency and accountability to an important application system increasing opportunity and leveling the playing field for rural areas.

COMMITTEE ACTION

H.R. 1665 was introduced on February 27, 2025, by Representative Kat Cammack (R-FL). The bill was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources. The bill was also referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce and the Committee on Agriculture. On April 9, 2025, the Committee on Natural Resources met to consider the bill. The bill was then ordered favorably reported to the House of Representatives by unanimous consent.

HEARINGS

For the purposes of clause 3(c)(6) of House rule XIII, the following hearing was used to develop or consider this measure: hearing in the 118th Congress by the Subcommittee on Federal Lands held on July 9, 2024.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1. Short title

Names the bill the “Deploying Infrastructure with Greater Internet Transactions And Legacy (DIGITAL) Applications Act.”

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Linda Hardesty, “Whoa—the fiber permitting process could crush digital divide dreams,” Fierce Network, December 9, 2021, <https://www.fierce-network.com/broadband/whoa-fiber-permitting-process-could-crush-digital-divide-dreams>.

²¹ H.R. 1665, 119th Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1665/text>.

²² *Id.*

²³ “Reps. Cammack, Matsui Introduce H.R. 3299, Bipartisan DIGITAL Applications Act To Close Digital Divide,” The Office of Congresswoman Kat Cammack, May 16, 2023, <https://cammack.house.gov/media/press-releases/rep-cammack-matsui-introduce-hr-3299-bipartisan-digital-applications-act>.

Section 2. Establishment of online portals to accept, process, and dispose of certain form 299s

Section 2 requires the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to establish, not later than one year after enactment of the bill, respective online portals for the acceptance, processing, and disposal of a Form 299 for communications use authorizations. Further, this section requires the Secretaries to notify the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information within three business days of their respective portal being established. Once notified, the section directs the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information to publish, on the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's official website, a link to each online portal established by the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior.

COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding clause 2(b)(1) of rule X and clause 3(c)(1) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Natural Resources' oversight findings and recommendations are reflected in the body of this report.

COMPLIANCE WITH HOUSE RULE XIII AND CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET ACT

1. *Cost of Legislation and the Congressional Budget Act.* Pursuant to clause 3(c)(2) of House rule XIII and section 308(a) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, and pursuant to clause 3(c)(3) of House rule XIII and section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee has requested but not received from the Director of the Congressional Budget Office a budgetary analysis and a cost estimate of this bill.

2. *General Performance Goals and Objectives.* As required by clause 3(c)(4) of rule XIII, the general performance goal or objective of this bill is to require the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture to establish online portals to accept, process, and dispose of certain Form 299s, and for other purposes.

EARMARK STATEMENT

This bill does not contain any Congressional earmarks, limited tax benefits, or limited tariff benefits as defined under clause 9(e), 9(f), and 9(g) of rule XXI of the Rules of the House of Representatives.

UNFUNDED MANDATES REFORM ACT STATEMENT

An estimate of federal mandates prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 423 of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act was not made available to the Committee in time for the filing of this report. The Chair of the Committee shall cause such estimate to be printed in the Congressional Record upon its receipt by the Committee, if such estimate is not publicly available on the Congressional Budget Office website.

EXISTING PROGRAMS

Directed Rule Making. This bill does not contain any directed rule makings.

Duplication of Existing Programs. This bill does not establish or reauthorize a program of the federal government known to be duplicative of another program. Such program was not included in any report from the Government Accountability Office to Congress pursuant to section 21 of Public Law 111–139 or identified in the most recent Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance published pursuant to the Federal Program Information Act (Public Law 95–220, as amended by Public Law 98–169) as relating to other programs.

APPLICABILITY TO LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Committee finds that the legislation does not relate to the terms and conditions of employment or access to public services or accommodations within the meaning of section 102(b)(3) of the Congressional Accountability Act.

PREEMPTION OF STATE, LOCAL OR TRIBAL LAW

Any preemptive effect of this bill over state, local, or tribal law is intended to be consistent with the bill’s purposes and text and the Supremacy Clause of Article VI of the U.S. Constitution.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

As ordered reported by the Committee on Natural Resources, H.R. 1665 would make no changes in existing law.

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June 30, 2025

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The Honorable Bruce Westerman, Chairman
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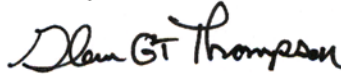
Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter confirms our mutual understanding regarding H.R. 1665, the "DIGITAL Applications Act." Thank you for collaborating with the Committee on Agriculture on the matters within our jurisdiction.

The Committee on Agriculture will forego any further consideration of this bill. However, by foregoing consideration at this time, we do not waive any jurisdiction over any subject matter contained in this or similar legislation. The Committee on Agriculture also reserves the right to seek appointment of an appropriate number of conferees, should it become necessary, and ask that you support such a request.

We would appreciate a response to this letter confirming this understanding with respect to H.R. 1665 and request a copy of our letters on this matter be published in the Congressional Record during Floor consideration.

Sincerely,



Glenn "GT" Thompson
Chairman

Cc: The Honorable Angie Craig, Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture
The Honorable Jared Huffman, Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources
The Honorable Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Jason Smith, Parliamentarian, U.S. House of Representatives

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July 1, 2025

The Honorable Glenn "GT" Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I write regarding our mutual understanding of H.R. 1665, the *DIGITAL Applications Act*, which was ordered report by the Committee on Natural Resources.

I recognize that the bill contains provisions that fall within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Agriculture and appreciate your willingness to forgo further consideration of the bill. I acknowledge that the Committee on Agriculture will not formally consider H.R. 1665 and agree that the inaction of your Committee with respect to the bill does not waive any jurisdiction over the subject matter contained therein.

I am pleased to support your request to name members of the Committee on Agriculture to any conference committee to consider such provisions. I will ensure that our exchange of letters is included in the *Congressional Record* during floor consideration of the bill. I appreciate your cooperation regarding this legislation.

Sincerely,



Bruce Westerman
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources

cc: The Honorable Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Angie Craig, Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture
The Honorable Jared Huffman, Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources
The Honorable Jason Smith, Parliamentarian, U.S. House of Representatives

