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Wicker Hopes Congress Will Pass Another COVID-19 Package

Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee Chairman Roger Wicker (R., Miss.) said today that he hopes Congress will pass another COVID-19 relief package. However, observers have said the chances of that appear dim.

“Presidential politics are in play,” Sen. Wicker said during a keynote session at the 2020 Incompas Show, which is being held virtually.

Mr. Wicker stressed the importance of connectivity during the pandemic, saying, “The pandemic has made it even more urgent that we close the digital divide in this country.”

Mr. Wicker also said he is working with congressional appropriators to make available funding to implement the Broadband DATA Act, which he introduced.

FCC Chairman Ajit Pai has said that the agency needs \$65 million to implement the legislation for the first year, including by investing in necessary IT upgrades.

Sen. Wicker also stressed the importance of ensuring that U.S. communications networks are secure. The Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Act that he introduced would provide \$1 billion to carriers to replace insecure equipment.

But the FCC’s Wireline Competition Bureau and Office of Economics and Analysis recently released the public results of the Commission’s supply chain security information, revealing that eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs) that responded to the information collection reported a total estimated cost of \$1.837 billion to remove and replace Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd. or ZTE Corp. equipment in their networks (TR Daily, Sept. 8). Mr. Wicker said that spending that amount is “well worth it.” —Paul Kirby, paul.kirby@wolterskluwer.com

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