

THE LAST MILE LETTER

SPECIAL EDITION:

Inside the FBA 2026 Public Policy Summit

Where fiber leaders and policymakers meet to shape the future of connectivity.

On **February 24-25**, nearly 70 FBA members, policymakers, advocates, and industry experts gathered in the nation's capital for the **Fiber Broadband Association's second annual Public Policy Summit** – two days of candid conversations about the future of broadband and the policies shaping America's digital infrastructure.

Many of the most important policy conversations happen behind closed doors. The FBA Summit offered a **seat at the table**. Throughout the event, FBA members engaged directly with lawmakers, senior staff, and policy leaders shaping the nation's connectivity agenda. The atmosphere was **welcoming, collaborative, and affirming** – a space where industry leaders could share insights, ask questions, and be heard.

The takeaway was clear: **FBA members are not just following the policy conversation – they are shaping it.**

And when policymakers and industry share the same table, the result is powerful: **a stronger voice for the communities and networks powering America's connected future.**



Gary Bolton, President and CEO of FBA, kicks off the 2026 Public Policy Summit.

In the Room

Throughout the summit, FBA members heard directly from leaders across Congress, federal agencies, and the media – an opportunity to engage with leading voices shaping in Washington, D.C.

Speakers included a Bipartisan Lineup:

- **Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV)**
- **Senator Peter Welch (D-VT)**
- **Chairman Richard Hudson (R-NC-09)**
- **Representative Jennifer McClellan (D-VA-04)**
- **Commissioner Olivia Trusty**, Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
- **Carl Hulse**, Chief Washington Correspondent, *The New York Times*
- **Brooke Donilon**, Chief of Staff, National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)
- **Cyrus Artz**, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (R-LA-04)
- **Audrey Beck**, Legislative Assistant, Office of Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD)
- **Parul Desai**, Chief Counsel, House Energy & Commerce Committee, Minority Staff
- **Sierra Fuller**, Policy Advisor, Office of Senator Jacky Rosen (D-NV)
- **John Lin**, Senior Counsel, House Energy & Commerce Committee, Majority Staff

The **breadth of speakers** reflected the growing recognition in Washington that **fiber infrastructure underpins America's economic competitiveness and technological leadership.**

As FCC Commissioner [Olivia Trusty](#) **emphasized during her remarks**: “Fiber deployment is key to achieving the goal of universal connectivity.” She also underscored the role fiber plays in America’s technological future: “Fiber also is necessary for U.S. leadership in AI and other emerging technologies.”



Chairman Richard Hudson with Gary Bolton



Representative Jennifer McClellan with Tinae Bluitt



Staff Panel from left to right: Ariane Schaffer (GFiber), John Lin, Sierra Fuller, Parul Desai, Audrey Beck



Carl Hulse with Kelly Bourne (LSG)



Brooke Donilon with Marissa Mitrovich



FCC Commissioner Olivia Trusty

Fiber Policy at the Center of the Conversation

Across sessions and conversations, several themes consistently surfaced.

Artificial intelligence, economic competitiveness, and digital opportunity are rapidly moving to the center of the broadband policy agenda. As policymakers consider the investments required to support the next generation of innovation, **fiber broadband is increasingly recognized as foundational infrastructure for the AI economy.**

Ensuring the United States remains globally competitive means continuing to deploy **reliable, high-capacity networks across the country** – including expanding access in rural communities that still lack future-ready connectivity.

As **Senator Peter Welch (VT)** noted: “Whether you’re talking about Vermont or North Carolina, folks in rural America have got to have affordable broadband. You need it for the doctor, to start a business, work from home, and even go to school. We have to keep up the fight to ensure every house and farm on every dirt road has access to broadband.”



Senator Peter Welch

These topics closely align with the Fiber Broadband Association’s [policy agenda](#), which focuses on accelerating deployment and ensuring communities across the country benefit from scalable, future-ready networks. Key priorities include:

- **Recognizing Fiber as the Critical Infrastructure for AI and Emerging Technologies**
- **Protecting and Prioritizing BEAD Non-Deployment Funds**
- **Advancing Permitting Reforms to Speed up Network deployment**
- **Ensuring Federal Broadband Grants are Not Taxed**
- **Connecting Rural Communities to Fiber Broadband**

Together, these priorities align with a goal frequently raised by lawmakers, including **Senator Shelley Moore Capito (WV)**, who has [emphasized](#) the importance of **ensuring every American, no matter their ZIP code, has access to fast, affordable, and reliable broadband.**



Senator Shelley Moore Capito

Light Byte: What's your Coffee Order?

Capitol Hill runs on coffee, so we kicked off our Hill staff panel with a simple question: “What's your morning order?”

The crowd favorite – and the order that had the majority of attendees talking long after the summit ended – came from Audrey Beck in Leader Thune's office. Her go-to is a **café miel**. It's surprisingly hard to find in D.C., but you'll spot it on nearly every coffee shop menu in South Dakota.

If you order one, expect a creamy, lightly sweet espresso drink made with steamed milk, honey, and a dash of cinnamon – a perfect way to start the day.



FBA members networking between sessions.

History on the Menu

On the evening of the summit, FBA members gathered at **The Monocle**, the historic restaurant just steps from the U.S. Capitol and a longtime meeting place for lawmakers, staff, and journalists. The timing could not have been more fitting. **Just blocks away, the State of the Union was underway**, placing FBA members at the heart of the capital on one of the most consequential nights in the policy calendar – President Trump's State of the Union Address.

As national attention turned toward the Capitol, summit participants continued their conversations about deployment, communities, and the policies shaping the future of connectivity.

Moments like these capture the spirit of the summit – **putting FBA members side by side with the policymakers shaping the future of connectivity.**



Advocacy in Action

The Summit wasn't just about conversation – it was about action.

The following day, FBA members took their message directly to Congress during meetings on **Capitol Hill**.

Participants organized into four groups, each joined by a member of FBA's Public Policy team, and conducted **more than 20 meetings in a single day**. Those conversations spanned both chambers of Congress and key committees overseeing policy issues impacting the fiber industry, ensuring members of Congress had a chance to companies serving the US from coast to coast.

In preparation for these meetings, the summit speakers offered an inside look at **what works – and what doesn't – when advocating on Capitol Hill**.



FBA Members at Congress during Capitol Fly-in

Two lessons stood out.

- **Cut through the noise.**

Congressional offices receive hundreds of messages daily – clarity and specificity matter.

- **Make it local.**

Policy conversations resonate most when they connect directly to communities back home. As one speaker put it, the district perspective makes the difference: “The district message helps the most. Every time. If it has a tangible impact on folks back home, that makes things interesting.”

For FBA members, the Fly-In provided exactly that opportunity – bringing real-world deployment experiences and community impacts directly into the policy conversation.



FBA members prepare for their Fly-In meetings on Capitol Hill.

They Talk About Us

The conversation didn't stay in the room. The Summit also drew attention from media outlets covering the growing role of fiber infrastructure in national policy discussions.

Coverage included:

- [Communications Daily](#)
- [Government Technology](#)
- [Bennington Banner](#)

Looking Ahead

The conversations that began in Washington will continue throughout the year.

Next up: the **Fiber Policy Lab in Indiana during [Regional Fiber Connect](#)**, where policymakers, industry leaders, and advocates will continue advancing the policies needed to support next-generation connectivity.

Because when fiber leads, the future follows.



Special thanks to our **sponsors, GFiber and PLP**, whose support helped bring industry leaders and policymakers together.

What Our Public Policy Co-Chairs Are Saying

“The FBA Policy Summit highlights the strength of our industry and the value of bringing members together with policymakers in Washington. These conversations help ensure that federal policy reflects the realities of deploying next generation fiber networks across the country.”

Chris Champion, C-Spire, FBA Public Policy Committee Co-Chair

“It was a great couple of days packed with discussions and meetings on how we're going to bridge the digital divide and make sure everyone can get online with high-speed, reliable fiber broadband connections.”

Ariane Schaffer, GFiber, FBA Public Policy Committee Board Liaison

“The Summit and Fly-In provided FBA members with an incredible opportunity to hear directly from broadband leaders shaping the industry's future. Members were also able to advocate for FBA's priorities in conversations with key decision makers and staff. It was an invaluable experience for members to gain insight into and influence what happens in Washington.”

Carsi Mitzner, Brightspeed, FBA Public Policy Committee Co-Chair