

**REMARKS OF
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INDIAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS INITIATIVE
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Good morning and thank you all for being a part of this important Telecommunications Workshop. It's been five years since we were last together here in Rapid City, and I am honored to be back and happy to kick off today's activities.

Preparing for today's meeting, I went back and looked at what we talked about in 2004. And what struck me most was how much things have changed—and how much they've stayed the same. And that's where I want to begin today.

A lot of things have changed—no doubt about that. In the summer of 2004 we were in the middle of a period of national drift when it came to bringing the wonders of modern communications to Indian Country and, indeed, to most parts of the United States. We had been given soaring political promises about building broadband out to everyone by 2007, but that was rhetoric, not reality. 2007 came and went, and the only change we saw was lots of other countries leaving us in their dust when it came to building broadband out to their citizens. Study after study showed us to be Number 15 or 20 or 24 in the world, and while the numbers varied from report to report, that doesn't matter because they agreed on one conclusion—the United States was behind and the trend was downward. What a place for your country and mine to be!

But—the good news—change has come. A year ago, all I had was high hopes that this would happen. I made speeches expressing my enthusiasm at the prospect of a new Administration that would bring with it, at long last, a deep and abiding commitment to build modern communications—broadband—all across America, and I always included Indian Country in my remarks. I was looking for—hoping for—leadership that would bring with it an understanding that so many of the problems we face as a nation would not be resolved—could not be resolved—without building communications infrastructure. I was looking for us to get serious about meeting this challenge. Everywhere I went, I called for a strategy to get the job done—a national broadband plan with all of us working together to make it happen—the agencies of government in a truly coordinated way; the private sector in partnership with government; and broad citizen input to formulate a plan to take broadband to every nook and cranny across this broad land of ours. So now the winds of change are blowing through the corridors of power in Washington. How refreshing it is to have new leadership, new hope and genuine commitment.

The Recovery and Reinvestment Act passed by Congress and signed by the President earlier this year did two wonderful things. First, it made the essential broadband commitment that I had been calling for by providing \$7.2 billion for the National Telecommunications Information Administration in the Department of Commerce and the Rural Utilities Service in the Department of Agriculture to offer

grants and loans for projects which will build essential infrastructure and promote broadband adoption and usage. Now, that's not going to get the job done by itself, don't get me wrong, but it's a significant down-payment on meeting our goal and it signals a determination to see the job through. And I want to point out that your Black Hills native son, Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein, was just confirmed by the United States Senate last Friday to run the Rural Utilities Service, which includes a broadband grant and loan program, plus programs for energy and water development. This is a position to which Jonathan brings outstanding qualifications and total dedication. He was a wonderful colleague fighting with me for the public interest at the FCC for seven years and he has a commitment that never stops on issues that are important to South Dakota and important to each of you. I already miss working alongside him every day at the FCC, but I look forward to continuing to work with him in this new capacity on issues we both believe in. And I anticipate working closely not just with RUS, but all the other government agencies and the White House as the FCC tackles the grand task assigned to it by Congress and President Obama under the Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The new approach to broadband goes beyond the down-payment. Because not only has our government made the commitment I wanted on broadband, but it went a step further and put the FCC in charge of developing the national broadband plan between now and next February. Let me tell you—that was music to my ears! It's the biggest job the Commission has ever had. And we have a new Chairman of the FCC, Julius Genachowski, who shares the commitment of his friend and our President to getting this job done—done well, done quickly, done right. So I am tremendously excited about the work we'll be doing over the next seven months to develop the plan and, after that, helping make it work.

But even as things have changed, a lot still stays the same. Too many places cry out for change, but in too many of them change remains a stranger. Our inner cities, our remote rural areas and, so starkly clear, Indian Country, are not benefiting from the tools and technologies of the Twenty-first century. In Pine Ridge where I will go later today, and in so many other places where Native Americans live, poverty endures, unemployment is at levels no society should accept, education languishes, and even basic public safety falls far short of what people have a right to expect. How far the hopes we shared five years ago have fallen from the tree of reality. Up-to-date communication is still a stranger to most of your lands, and even plain old telephone service is at shockingly low levels of penetration. And we don't even have solid data on this. The most recent figures are from the last census, which showed telephone subscribership at a level of about 69 percent in Native American households—but much, much lower in many places. And we don't even begin to have reliable data on the status of Internet subscribership on tribal lands—because no one collects it. Anecdotally, we all know that broadband access on tribal lands is minimal, and that's about it. That's not just unacceptable—it's a national disgrace. Until all of Indian Country is connected to a Twenty-first century telecommunications grid, its residents can only fall further behind the rest of the country, while the country falls further behind the rest of the world. Things can't be allowed to stay the same.

Realize right here that all this talk about broadband is not just a lot of palaver about new technology for the sake of new technology. This is about building our country. Broadband is about enabling people, it's about opening the doors of opportunity and self-fulfillment. It goes to just about every problem confronting our country right now. There are no solutions to poor schools and lagging education, to high unemployment and lost jobs, to shameful standards of health care, to public safety systems so unreliable that two teenagers in a car accident on a cold May evening can't call for help—their wireless phones have no service—and they freeze to death. There are no solutions to any of these problems that do not have critical broadband components to them. *That's* what broadband is all about. Enable broadband and we can attack all these problems. Enable broadband and we enable our country and ourselves.

In my eight years at the FCC, I've had the opportunity to meet with many tribal leaders and to see, first-hand, the difference that telecom can bring to people's lives. I've come to understand how much harm the lack of telecommunications infrastructure can inflict—and it's a lot. I just do not see any exit to the poverty and lost opportunities that continue to bedevil so much of Indian Country unless we bring these enabling tools of communication to you. That means basic telephone service, of course. But it also means the new possibilities of broadband. I like to refer to the pots and the pans. The POTS are Plain Old Telephone Service. The PANS are the Pretty Awesome New Stuff. Indian Country is in desperate need of both POTS and PANS.

And with those new utensils, tribal communities will have the resources and the opportunity to grow—right here. Broadband can provide to you—at home, or at the community center, the Boys and Girls Club, the library—the means for not just basic communication or one-way information gathering, but for economic development and gainful employment, education, healthcare, public safety, you name it. Broadband opens up your world to others so, for example, you can run a successful local crafts business online, where people from all over the world can see and purchase items from you. Broadband also unites your community and gives members near and far the opportunity to come together—through family newsletters, tribal citizens' websites, a webinar. You could watch or even participate interactively in tribal council meetings over the Net. It can encourage your young people to stay here because they can find opportunity here and it can even bring some of those who have gone away back home. Through distance learning, students can gain exposure to other schools, classes and subject matters; they can obtain advanced degrees; students young and old can participate in language classes in their native language. And through our new Rural Healthcare Pilot Program, as well as other national healthcare initiatives, more healthcare services can come available to tribal communities and people who otherwise could not travel long distances to visit medical facilities and healthcare specialists.

These broadband networks, in order to be effective, must be ubiquitous. There can't be any areas left behind as we build them—unless we are content to cut people off from the tools they need to prepare and empower themselves for life in the Twenty-first century. Because the truth is that we are all in this together. Either we progress together as a society or we progress not at all. Sometimes in America we've come late—very

late—to this understanding. But it has to be the vision that binds us together, because the strength of America *is* the diversity of America. It is the wonderful tapestry of races and cultures and creeds and talents and interests that will forge our destiny. There are still some among us who see our diversity as a problem to be overcome. Well, it's not. It is an opportunity to be harvested. It's our leg up on the rest of the world—*if* we learn how to take advantage of it. But if we don't figure out how to take full advantage of this amazing wealth of diversity, we won't ever come close to fulfilling the promise of America.

Last time I was here, I shared a memory with you, but I want to share it again this morning because it was one of the most eloquent things I've heard—a remark by my friend Tex Hall when we were gathered together, I think it was in Phoenix back in 2002 or so. And Tex was speaking to a little group of us and he told us about an old adage that American Indians are “many tribes, one family.” That has stayed with me all these years because it's such a good way to think about this great country of ours with all its diverse people—many tribes, one family. All in it together.

Bringing that family together is our challenge. It's not something we can finish at a two or three day conference. But it is something we can launch. So let me share with you some principles that I believe need to guide our work together.

First is ensuring that we are all planning together as the FCC works to complete its broadband plan over the next not-quite-seven months. Our national broadband plan, if it is to really work for the people, cannot be another one of those “inside” jobs. The usual suspects—the lawyers and lobbyists and special interests who know the inside of the FCC as well as the inside of their own homes—sure, they'll always be with us. And I'm happy to meet with them. But they can't be the whole story—we have to look beyond them—way beyond—if we're going to develop policies that serve all the people. The Commission has to reach out not just to these traditional stakeholders, but to what I call our “non-traditional stakeholders”—the folks who don't have registered lobbyists and fancy consultants in Washington and who don't have the time or money to scan the pages of *The Federal Register* to see what proceedings affecting their lives are being decided at the FCC. To me, the term “non-traditional stakeholder” includes every citizen who wishes to have a say, including everyone in this room. I want the FCC, in everything it does—not just broadband—to reach out to you and to all interested stakeholders on these issues. That certainly was my intent on April 8, 2009, when the Commission released the Notice of Inquiry looking for public input on the broadband plan. And this attitude will characterize our work going forward under our new Chairman and the new Commission taking shape in Washington right now. This means we want *you*—we want, we need, we are asking for your input. That's the reason I'm here today, why I'm in Rapid City this morning and in Pine Ridge this afternoon. You are affected by so much of what we do and we really need to hear from you—early and often. I have seen in my time at the Commission that you have tremendous and informed and spirited advocates in your communities, from tribal leaders to those running tribally-owned and operated telephone companies and many others attending this meeting today representing a number of organizations. We need a constant and closer dialogue among us—not just in occasional

meetings like this, but in an ongoing way where our communication is seamless and regular and as meaningful as we can make it. Every one of you in this audience is just as much a stakeholder in our decision process as anyone else in the land—but unless we find ways to make your views count, your stake is devalued. And Native Americans have seen more than enough of diminished stakes in their history.

The FCC's agenda over the coming months is ambitious, and the schedule for the broadband plan alone will keep our staff working around the clock. From the Notice of Inquiry in April, we collected the first round of comments and reply comments for the national broadband plan, and they added up to more than 8,000 pages. And that was just the warm-up! Through the rest of the summer, the Commission will be conducting a series of workshops aimed at promoting open dialogue between the Commission and constituents on the national broadband plan. These workshops will include issues such as adoption in low utilization areas—specifically rural, minority and tribal communities, which will be held the afternoon of August 19th. I'm sure you will hear more about that from our staff speaking here today, if you are not aware of it already. You should be a part of many of the 21 workshops already scheduled, and I believe more may be coming later. The subjects covered range from general deployment to how broadband will be an integral part of health care, a clean and sustainable environment, energy conservation and education. The Commission will be seeking public participation far beyond the workshops. I want to see additional opportunities for written comments and public hearings. And I am working with the Chairman's office to make sure that the concerns of Indian Country when it comes to broadband access are heard all along the way. We must also make sure that you have sufficient notice, as well as the facilities and the means needed to take advantage of all of these opportunities to participate.

Let me be blunt. I believe broadband—real high-speed, high-value, transformative broadband—is coming to many parts of America. The question is: Is it coming to Indian Country? I don't know. Surely it's no slam-dunk. But it will come if we work together starting right now. It will come if we understand how important this is and that it's something we can't do without in the Twenty-first century unless we want to be left even further behind. It will come if we can be practical and pragmatic and talk with one another and figure ways to reconcile competing interests that will otherwise ensure that nothing happens. So your participation in this process is not a luxury, not an option. It's a necessity. We have to find creative ways to make that participation happen. And we have to find those ways by talking and planning together, starting right here in Rapid City at this conference this week.

Second, we must implement. Listening, talking, planning—those are the first essential steps. But actions speak loudest. NTIA and RUS will be starting off this action with the grant and loan programs, and the FCC will carry those actions much further with the development of the national broadband plan. But the mere presentation of that plan to Congress next February 17 will not be the end, but another beginning. At that time, if not sooner, we should be taking action on what we already know, and what we've learned along the way.

One thing we know, and I alluded to this a moment ago, is that even though we have this big broadband plan to concentrate on, great expanses of Indian Country still lack basic voice service. We have to make sure that basic voice services are available everywhere so that you can, for example, reach help when you need help. In some areas that may mean completing plans already on the drawing board. In others, we can hopefully take advantage of the sizzling pace of technology change to leapfrog to new technologies, getting there not incrementally but by by-passing an earlier generation's technology tools.

There are a host of other pending and related issues that cry out for resolution—like Universal Service issues left simmering on the back burner for too many years. Lifeline and Link-Up, for example. And E-Rate funding for tribal libraries because the E-Rate program can truly accelerate the roll-out of Internet services across the country. These programs are not having the powerful effect they should be having for Native Americans.

Tower siting is another unresolved challenge. Towers can bring exciting new wireless technologies—including broadband—to Indian Country. But they sometimes raise important questions regarding historical preservation, cultural identity and tribal sovereignty. The Programmatic Agreement adopted by the Commission in 2004 was supposed to improve coordination between the FCC, tribes and industry. At the time of its adoption, I expressed concerns about the inclusiveness of the process. I continue to be concerned over the potential for towers to be built without environmental assessments in far more places, some of which could endanger sites of cultural or religious significance. But I'll say this, too: building out wireless and broadband requires extensive infrastructure and it doesn't happen without that infrastructure. We have to work together on this and strike a workable balance—our communications needs are urgent and towers are part of the solution. But so, too, is sensitivity to the serious concerns that have been raised by many tribal communities.

Then there's public safety—the service—the security—every person must have when they are in danger or in trouble. We need not just public safety voice communications but an interoperable broadband public safety network that spans the nation—*all* parts of the nation. I plan to talk more about this in Pine Ridge later today, but we must all understand that no community in America should be expected to do without the tools of up-to-date public safety communications. Which means we need to address Indian Country access to 911 and E911, call centers, public safety answering points, GIS (geographic information system) mapping, and ultimately first responders.

Third, returning to the big picture, let's remember we're all in this together. I am a true believer in partnerships and I've spent the better part of my public service career trying to bring people together to pursue their common good. I'll spare you my usual history review, but I do believe that partnerships are how, coursing back throughout history, we have overcome our greatest challenges and how we built our essential infrastructure. The importance of partnerships is of particular relevance to all of us here. Indeed, the FCC's Policy on "Establishing a Government-to-Government Relationship

with Indian Tribes” recognizes that the FCC as an independent agency has a Trust Responsibility toward tribes. While you are consumers of telecommunications, I also understand that Tribal Nations have a very special status, making it even more important that we obtain tribal input on all communications topics at the FCC and that we consult with the tribes whenever matters of mutual interest are being discussed—and that’s much of the time.

Finally, there are other decisions waiting to be made at the FCC that need your active input. I know from my previous trips out here that radio and television present huge challenges across Indian Country. Coverage is spotty, stations are scarce and resources are few and far between. Some of you may know that I spend a lot of time working on media issues and that I believe the mindless media industry consolidation we have witnessed over the past quarter century has not served us well. Americans everywhere are much better served if their media is local and diverse and competitive rather than centrally-owned, centrally-managed and centrally-programmed by Madison Avenue advertisers.

When I was here in 2004, the Commission held a separate hearing on media and some of the most compelling testimony I have ever heard about what lack of local media means came from Indian Country representatives who told us about being shut out of the news, about how their contributions and culture too often got the short end of the stick, about how they were stereotyped and caricatured when big national media replaced local independent media. We’ve got to change this. And we have to find ways that Native Americans and all minorities and women are given the incentives and access to capital they need to start up their own stations. Because I’ll tell you one thing—Native American-owned stations will do a much better job serving Native Americans than some absentee station owner headquartered 2000 miles away. Does anyone here think that Big Media has done a good job reflecting your issues, your needs, your interests, your culture? Well, until it does your issues are not going to get the discussion and the attention they need if they’re going to be successfully addressed. So here, my friends, is a critically important issue where you need to get involved because if media is not covering you or your issues and interests, you are deprived of something precious that you need to have and are entitled to have. I intend to keep pushing as hard as I can on these media issues, but I need your help on them—I really do. So I hope you’ll sign up.

So many issues, so much need, so little time. I close not just with a recommendation that you participate actively on all these issues. I close with an urgent plea that you do so. Yes, of course, it’s a huge challenge to find the resources and to find the time to take an active, ongoing role. But I’ve been in Washington a long time—almost 40 years—and it’s made me a firm believer in an old adage that says this: “Decisions without you are usually decisions against you.” The big guys, the huge telecom companies and Big Media giants understand this—that’s why we hear from them all the time—sometimes every day! No, you can’t afford to take a pass. You can’t risk the costs of not participating—not when so much is at stake. And I repeat that we have to make it easier for you to participate. But I’m happy to say we have a new urgency about this at the Commission, from the top down. I think our new Chief of Staff may have

something to say about this in a few minutes. Eddie Lazarus knows your issues, understands your needs and has already worked with our new Chairman and with me to move these issues forward. I believe that in the weeks just ahead you're going to see some innovative initiatives to facilitate the participation of *all* interested stakeholders in the deliberations of the FCC.

We have, my friends, a rare and golden opportunity to make progress now. It's an opportunity that's been a long time coming. You know better than most how long the wait has been. You know good things don't just happen. When the opportunity for change comes, it has to be seized. It has to be worked. It has to be won. Just because new folks are in power, just because ambitious new goals have been stated, doesn't mean it will all somehow fall automatically into place. These rare moments of reform and change can end as quickly as they begin. Time waits for none of us—and time will be our enemy unless we plan and work together and implement now. We—the FCC, the NTIA, the RUS, all the other agencies of federal, state, tribal and local governments, plus consumers, industries, I mean *all* of us—working under the general policy direction established by Congress and the President, all of us focused on bringing the opportunity-creating tools of modern communications to you and to every one of our fellow citizens. That's what it's going to take.

“Many tribes, one nation”—we can still make it happen.

Thank you.