

**Prepared Remarks of FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski**

**NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS**

**2010 Executive Council Winter Session**

**Washington, D.C.**

**March 2, 2010**

Thank you, President Keel, for that wonderful introduction, and thank you, NCAI, for inviting me to speak this afternoon.

I am honored and a bit intimidated to be part of a lineup with so many impressive public officials, including Secretary Ray Lahood, Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, and Congressman Tom Cole.

It's an honor to address such a distinguished gathering of Tribal leaders, and to reaffirm the relationship between the Commission and Indian Country. Our ties are strong, and we will make them even stronger in the months and years ahead.

Many people have worked hard to draw us closer together, and I'd like to acknowledge some of them today.

My colleague on the Commission, Michael Copps, has been an outspoken advocate for Tribal communities for many years, and he spoke forcefully on behalf of the Tribes during the development of the National Broadband Plan. And I know that all my fellow commissioners are engaged on Tribal issues.

Geoffrey Blackwell served at the Commission for six years as our Tribal Liaison, and after he left, he has continued to help us hear the voices of Indian Country.

Our most recent Tribal Liaison, Shana Barehand, was a passionate proponent for Tribes at the FCC. Since her departure from the Commission last December, her role is being filled with professionalism and vigor by our Acting Tribal Liaison, Michael Connelly. I want to thank all of these people, plus Yul Kwon, for helping build a bridge between the Commission and Indian Nations.

A special relationship exists between the Federal government and Tribal governments, which we are committed to honoring and strengthening.

We are committed to working with you on a government-to-government basis.

We are committed to respecting Tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

We are committed to consulting with you on a regular basis to ensure that all Tribal communities enjoy the benefits of a modern communications infrastructure, including broadband.

There's another reason the relationship between the FCC and Tribal governments is special and unique. When it comes to broadband and communications technology, nowhere are the challenges AND opportunities greater than in Indian Country.

As many of you know, as part of the Recovery Act, Congress and the President charged the Commission with developing a strategy to bring high-speed Internet and its benefits to all Americans.

Broadband is our generation's major infrastructure challenge. It's like roads, canals, railroads and telephones for previous generations.

In terms of transformative power, I think broadband is most akin to the advent of electricity. Both broadband and electricity are what some call "general purpose technologies" -- technologies that are a means to a great many ends, enabling innovations in a wide array of human endeavors.

One of the main statistics I often cite when talking about the need for a National Broadband Plan is that ONLY 65 percent of Americans have broadband in the home.

In Indian Country, 65 percent is roughly the adoption rate for TELEPHONE service. That's unacceptable.

I am fortunate to be served by Eddie Lazarus, the first FCC Chief of Staff who is an expert on Tribal law. He learned about the plight of the Sioux nations from his father, who represented the Sioux in their historic legal struggle with the U.S. government over the Black Hills. Eddie wrote a book on this struggle and provides me invaluable insight on the unique challenges facing Indian Country.

When it comes to broadband, we don't even have the basic data to fully understand the scope of the challenge, though we know the problem is severe.

The best evidence indicates that the broadband deployment rate on Tribal lands is less than 10 percent.

Submissions from the record suggest that actual usage rates may be as low as 5 percent.

So when we talk about bringing the technology of the future to Tribal lands, I recognize the tremendous challenges we face, and understand that we must approach these issues through their own unique lens.

For example, while the number of competing providers is a real issue in many parts of the country, the extreme isolation of most Tribes leave them with no provider at all.

Where broadband is available, in general we've found that a major barrier to broadband adoption is affordability. With crippling poverty on Tribal lands, that's going to be an

even bigger obstacle in Indian Country.

Put simply, bringing faster, affordable broadband service to people in Monument Valley is a lot harder than bringing it to people in Silicon Valley. I get that.

I also get that these challenges mean that we're just going to need to work harder.

Because for all the challenges we face in bringing high-speed Internet to Indian Country, the potential benefits are even greater.

I spoke earlier about how Tribal lands still face challenges in deploying basic communications services like telephone. High-speed Internet is not only the Web and email; it's a telephone; it's television; it's a library; it's a town hall.

Broadband has the potential to help Tribal communities advance farther, faster, than any new technology in our lifetime.

Broadband is a platform for job creation and economic growth.

Studies from the Brookings Institute, MIT, the World Bank, and others all tell us the same thing -- that even modest increases in broadband adoption nationally can yield hundreds of thousands of new jobs, and broadband can generate jobs in Indian Country.

Broadband is a platform for innovation. If you have a high-speed Internet connection, you can dream big, bring those dreams to life, and then bring them to the world.

Broadband also is a platform for solutions to so many of our major challenges: education, health care, energy, public safety, and democratic engagement.

Broadband's ability to transcend the barriers of distance could be particularly potent for Tribal communities.

With broadband, entrepreneurs on Tribal lands don't need to move to the cities. They can collaborate, innovate, and create new small businesses and high-value jobs because they have access to robust and open information networks.

With broadband, kids in Tribal schools can have access in their classrooms to the best teachers in the world, and access in their homes to up-to-date e-textbooks and high-quality tutoring from energized college and grad students around America.

With broadband, a Native American with diabetes can get dietary counseling on her home computer, a remote diagnosis in a nearby facility, and, if necessary, even surgery aided remotely by specialists at teaching hospitals.

That world is within our grasp. But we're not there yet.

We have to develop a meaningful plan to deploy broadband, create jobs and economic growth in Indian Country; to unleash new waves of innovation and investment; and to improve education, health care, energy efficiency, public safety, and self-governance in Tribal lands.

This is where the National Broadband Plan comes in.

This plan has been developed after carefully review of the submissions from Tribal leaders. Many Tribal governments and organizations, including NCAI, shared with us the challenges they face concerning broadband deployment and access.

We also learned about Tribes that overcame these challenges using creative, Tribal-centric solutions. For example:

- The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe is about to launch a mobile broadband network to begin service on Tribal lands in North and South Dakota with spectrum purchased from a major wireless carrier.
- The Coeur d'Alene Tribe in Northern Idaho has established a Tribally-owned wireless ISP and a community technology center with a computer lab, a Network Operations Center, and Tribal Government Information Technology services.
- The Southern California Tribal Digital Village hosts email, web browsing, distance learning and other services, and links educational and public safety facilities on 13 reservations, and is planning on expanding service to several thousand residences.
- The Tlingit and Haida Tribes in Southeastern Alaska, are establishing a series of business centers equipped with classrooms, computers, and high-speed Internet to support small and emerging private enterprises, as well as individual efforts for job searches and distance learning.

One additional lesson we learned from these success stories is that once broadband is deployed in Indian Country, Tribal communities become enthusiastic adopters.

The clear message both in your comments and in these examples is that the unique circumstances of Tribes must be considered in the National Broadband Plan, and that Tribal governments must have a central role in developing solutions to increase broadband access and adoption to their communities.

So how will the National Broadband Plan begin tackling the goal of bringing broadband to Tribal lands?

The biggest concern facing Tribal lands is simply getting connected. The plan will include a “once-in-a-generation” transformation of the \$8 billion Universal Service Fund -- converting it over time to broadband support and freeing up more resources to build 21<sup>st</sup> century communications networks, including on Tribal lands.

In addition, we will help more Tribal libraries qualify for E-rate funding and recommend the creation of a Tribal seat on both the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service and the USAC Board of Directors

Even with these changes to the Universal Service Fund (USF), a sizable funding gap will still exist. To help close this gap, the Plan will also recommend:

- Creating a separate Tribal Broadband Fund to support sustainable deployment and adoption programs in Indian Country;
- Providing funding to upgrade connectivity for federal facilities on Tribal lands, including those managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Indian Education, and the Indian Health Service; and
- Allowing more members of the Tribal community to share connectivity funded by the E-rate and Rural Health Care programs.

To help Tribal communities acquire technical broadband skills and expertise, the Plan will recommend that the FCC expand its Indian Telecommunications Initiative. We will also propose allowing Tribal representatives to participate in our FCC University training programs at no cost.

To close the information gap about broadband access and usage in Indian Country, the Plan will recommend efforts to improve data collection on Tribal lands, including making Tribes eligible for grants for future broadband mapping and planning projects, and facilitating data sharing between broadband providers and Tribes.

To enhance communications and consulting with Tribal governments, the Plan proposes three new mechanisms.

1) Government-wide, the Plan will recommend the creation of a Federal-Tribal Broadband Initiative consisting of Tribal leaders and officials from across all federal agencies. This Initiative will improve coordination, streamline programs, and reduce redundancies.

2) Within the FCC, the Plan will recommend the creation of an Office of Tribal Affairs with enough staff, resources, and authority to consult regularly with Tribal leaders and coordinate within the FCC.

3) The plan also proposes a separate task force consisting of senior FCC Staff and Tribal leaders that will focus specifically on broadband deployment and adoption on Tribal lands.

In addition to wireline broadband, mobile broadband offers tremendous possibilities for Tribal communities. We will explore ways of improving Tribal access to and use of spectrum, including how to improve the Tribal Land Bidding Credit program, how to help Tribes know what spectrum is available over Tribal lands, and how to create additional flexibility and incentives for building out facilities serving Tribal lands.

Lastly, as many of you are aware, the Commission recently adopted rules giving priority to Tribes in getting broadcast radio licenses in Tribal communities. These rules will give precedence to federally-recognized American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages that want to set up new radio stations that serve communities on Tribal lands. Many of the comments we received in the broadband context encouraged the FCC to establish a similar priority for wireless licenses. The National Broadband Plan will recommend that the Commission look at expanding any Tribal priority policy to include the process for licensing fixed and mobile wireless licenses covering Tribal lands.

There are more recommendations within the Plan that we believe will help Indian Country. When the full Plan is released, I look forward to working together to implement them, and continually identifying the best ideas to meet our shared goals.

The goal of the bringing broadband to Indian Country is important and urgent. It will require the Federal government to recognize the importance of Tribal autonomy and work hand-in-hand with Tribal governments as partners.

We will also work closely with leaders in Congress on these issues, including Chairman Daniel Inouye (D-HI), Senator Tom Udall (D-NM), Alaska Senators Mark Begich (D-AK) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Senator Byron Dorgan, Representative Tom Cole (R-OK), Representative Frank Pallone (D-NJ), and Majority Whip Jim Clyburn (D-SC).

Broadband enhances, and will continue to enhance, the ability of Indian Nations to serve their people and determine their own course. The National Broadband Plan will provide a clear path forward for accomplishing these goals. I echo the words of President Keel in saying that “our great hope is that the next year will be, like this past year, one of achievement.”

I look forward to building on the strong relationship between the Commission and NCAI. Working together, I believe we can turn Indian Country into a model for digital transformation and success.

Thank you.

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