

**STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI
ON PRESENTATION BY THE OFFICE OF NATIVE AFFAIRS AND POLICY**

March 20, 2013

It goes without saying that Native communities and cultures have an important place in the American story. Indeed, my home state of Kansas is named after the Kansa, a tribe that once inhabited the wide, windswept plains of the Midwest. Cities from Ocala, Florida to Seattle, Washington owe their names to the rich traditions of our Native peoples. Today, there are 566 federally recognized tribes across the country with 1.9 million members—too many of whom face substantial challenges in life.

Communications services can help bring prosperity, health, and education to Native populations that have not always been given these opportunities. As we saw during the presentation, a radio station serving the Hopi reservation can provide local content that is not found anywhere else. A broadband connection can promote telehealth among Native Americans in South Dakota who otherwise might not have access to appropriate medical care. And a wireless network can help those who live in Alaska Native villages unreachable by road and water stay in touch with one another.

But to make these kinds of communications services more available to Indian Country, we have to understand the full scope of the problem. That requires outreach and that requires engagement. As we at the FCC undertake each of these tasks, we are lucky to have the support of the Office of Native Affairs and Policy (ONAP). As we've seen today, ONAP has served, and I'm sure will continue to serve, as an important resource as we seek to bring the benefits of a 21st century digital economy to everyone within the United States.

Particularly in light of the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on our agenda this morning addressing 911 resiliency, one other issue deserves mention. We must not lose sight of the fact that Tribal Nations also need a robust public-safety communications system. I am therefore pleased that today marks the beginning of the inaugural Native American Emergency Services and Management Conference, and that this afternoon, the conference will feature a panel on emergency communications and technology. I hope that the staff of ONAP will keep track of this discussion and report back to us if there are steps that the FCC can take to help ensure reliable emergency communications in Indian Country.

Particular thanks to Geoffrey Blackwell, Irene Flannery, Dan Rumelt, Lyle Ishida, Beau Finley, and Rod Flowers for your efforts to ensure that our Native communities continue to be a part of the dialogue here at the FCC.