

**REMARKS OF FCC COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI
AT THE FIRST MEETING OF THE ROBOCALL STRIKE FORCE**

WASHINGTON, DC

AUGUST 19, 2016

Let me paint a picture for you. One Monday night, the Kansas City Chiefs are battling the Oakland Raiders at Arrowhead Stadium. It's a close game. You've settled in to watch America's Team during a clutch fourth quarter drive. But just before the snap and hand off to Jamaal Charles, your phone rings. You reluctantly answer, only to hear a recorded message claiming to be from the IRS. The caller says that you owe the government money and will be arrested unless you pay immediately. You hang up and realize that you just missed Charles' romp through an open lane and into the end zone.

Artificial or prerecorded calls—"robocalls," as they're known—are awful. They're intrusive. They're unwanted. Many, like the recent wave of IRS-related robocalls, are a scam. Robocalls and telemarketing calls are the number one source of consumer complaints received by the FCC. Former Senator Fritz Hollings, who I had the pleasure of meeting with last year, put it well: he once referred to robocalls as "the scourge of civilization."

The broad, deep, and enduring dislike that consumers have for robocalls inspires our work this morning. We are gathered here at the inaugural meeting of the Robocall Strike Force—an industry-led group with an appropriately intimidating name, and one that, according to its charge, will try to develop ways to prevent, detect, and filter out these unwanted calls.

I want to commend the many folks who have rolled up their sleeves and committed to solving this problem. A number of people and organizations have already spent sweat equity on this issue, and they deserve to be recognized.

- For instance, the Federal Trade Commission's 2013 Robocall Challenge focused the tech industry's attention on robocalling. And the app that was one of the winners of the challenge—Nomorobo, developed by Aaron Foss—has stopped over 126 million robocalls. It's one of the leading anti-robocalling apps in the country. *See* <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2013/04/ftc-announces-robocall-challenge-winners>.
- The Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions (ATIS), the Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) Forum, and the Internet Engineer Task Force's Secure Telephone Identity Revisited Working Group (IETF STIR WG) have been developing standards to reduce illegitimate Caller ID spoofing, which will help consumers be able to identify and avoid fraudulent robocalls. Spoofing is a, if not *the*, critical input that enables robocalling, and the work of these dedicated experts is critical.
- And last but certainly not least, I want to express my appreciation to the industry participants in this task force, especially AT&T for chairing it. Your efforts will help

attack this “scourge of civilization”—something that everyone other than Rachel from Card Services would applaud.

I look forward to learning more about the scope of the problem and the potential solutions. And I hope participants will ponder a few questions as we labor together to stamp out unwanted robocalls. For instance:

- Should we encourage Congress to pass the bipartisan Anti-Spoofing Act of 2015, introduced by Representatives Grace Meng, Joe Barton, and Leonard Lance, to crack down on foreign callers that prey on Americans using spoofed Caller ID for their robocalls?
- Should the FCC take more enforcement actions against unscrupulous telemarketers and known robocallers, given the tens of thousands of complaints we receive from consumers each month?
- How can we make it easier for consumers to tell us about robocalls they receive and make it easier for the Enforcement Bureau to track down and shut down fraudulent robocallers?
- Would carving out a safe harbor for telephone companies seeking to provide call-blocking services to their customers encourage experimentation?
- Would creating a reassigned-numbers database give callers the ability to avoid dialing wrong numbers by mistake?
- Would granting the petition of 51 consumer-advocacy organizations to overturn the FCC-created exemption for federal contractors close a potential loophole in our robocalling regulations?

I hope that everyone here—government officials, industry representatives, consumers, and others—can rally around the purpose I’ve outlined this morning. And, to borrow from former President Kennedy: Let every robocaller know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any solution, and oppose any bot to assure the survival and the peace of American consumers—and Kansas City Chiefs fans, in particular.