**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI**

**AT THE WYOMING ASSOCIATION OF BROADCASTERS CONVENTION**

**CASPER, WY**

**JUNE 10, 2017**

It’s great to be in Wyoming. And I really, really mean that. This is the 18th and final—I stress, final—stop on a road trip that began this past Monday in Milwaukee. We’ve logged over 1,600 miles through Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, South Dakota, and now this great state. I can’t remember the last time I was this tired, and I have two children under the age of six.

I want to take this opportunity to introduce my senior counsel, Nick Degani. Please join me in applauding my sidekick for this entire journey. It’s fitting that our two-man buddy odyssey is finishing about an hour from the Hole-in-the-Wall hideout made famous in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. I would add that speaking to Wyoming broadcasters is a much better final destination than being surrounded by gunmen in Bolivia.

This is my first visit to Wyoming as a member of the FCC. In fact, it’s my first time in Wyoming, period. But I already feel like I know this place. I hail from a small town in Kansas, so I have a deep affinity for wide-open spaces and homespun hospitality. Plus, one of my favorite athlete names of all-time is Fennis Dembo. Is that too dated? Should I have made a joke about Josh Allen?

I also have a soft spot for one particular Wyoming broadcaster: the legendary Curt Gowdy. Gowdy was on the call for two of the most memorable baseball games of my youth. One was the Kansas City Royals’ clincher in Game 7 of the 1985 World Series. The other was the Mariners/Angels clash at the end of the Leslie Nielsen cinematic classic *The Naked Gun*—or as I call it, the Enrico Pallazzo game.

Gowdy began his broadcasting career right here in Wyoming in 1943. He started off by calling a six-man high-school football game from atop a wooden grocery crate for KFBC-AM in Cheyenne. Announcing this contest would have been a challenge even for an experienced sports broadcaster. He wasn’t given team rosters. The players didn’t have jersey numbers. And the field had no yard markers or goal lines. But Gowdy succeeded. In fact, according to his son, Gowdy later said that game was the height of his creativity because he just made up the whole thing.

By the way, almost 75 years later, KFBC is still serving the people of Cheyenne, airing University of Wyoming Cowboys and Cowgirls sports, among other things. And that speaks to the enduring value of broadcasting. Time passes and technology changes, but local broadcasters remain the linchpins of their communities.

Local broadcasters are who we turn to when disaster strikes and we are desperate for up-to-the-minute information. Local broadcasters are who we look to for local news and weather. And local broadcasters keep us entertained with everything from the most popular shows and songs to calls of our favorite college and high school sports. It’s shared experiences like these that help bind our communities.

That’s why I’ve made it a point to champion local broadcasting since I was appointed to the FCC more than five years ago. And I’ve doubled down on that commitment since becoming the Chairman of our great agency.

I’ll touch on a few of the initiatives we’ve been pursuing.

Prior to becoming Chairman, it’s fair to say that one of my signature issues was AM radio revitalization. Having grown up in rural America, I had a deep understanding and appreciation for the value of AM radio. And to the chagrin of some in Washington, DC, I talk about this a fair bit.

Now, as you probably know, when we are at full strength, the partisan makeup of the Commission is 3-to-2. And if you’re on the short end of that equation, it can be hard to get your issues to the top of the agenda. Fortunately, AM revitalization was different. Of course, it didn’t happen overnight. I first proposed this in 2012, and the FCC didn’t issue its first rule changes until 2015. But this issue eventually took hold for two key reasons: one, revitalizing AM radio was smart policy that advanced the public interest. And two, because countless people from around the country made their voices heard in support of this cause until they became too loud to ignore.

To date, the centerpiece of our reforms has been helping AM broadcasters get FM translators. Thus far, the response has been tremendous. Last year, the FCC gave AM stations more latitude to move an FM translator purchased on the secondary market. We received nearly 1,100 applications and granted almost 95% of these requests.

Wyoming broadcasters have gotten in on the action at a higher rate than the national average. Nine AM stations across the Equality State obtained FM translators to grow their audience—from KODI in Cody to KWOR in Worland. That’s more than 25% of AM stations in Wyoming.

For stations that didn’t participate, the FCC agreed to open two new FM translator application windows, in which AM stations can apply for a new translator. And if mutually exclusive applications can’t be resolved, those applications would proceed to an auction. I’m pleased to report that last week, the Commission unanimously decided that the first application window, which will open on July 26. This window will be for Class C and D stations. And this week, we released instructions for those AM stations interested in applying. If you’re an eligible AM broadcaster, I hope you tune in and figure out if you want to take advantage of this unique opportunity.

Of course, there are other important elements to our AM Radio Revitalization Initiative. The FCC has made a number of proposals relating to the AM band that remain pending. I’m optimistic that we’ll be able to move forward on some of them before the end of the year.

Now that I’m Chairman, I’m able to take a different approach to broadcasting issues—to all issues, for that matter. As a minority Commissioner, I had to focus on a few specific issues and gradually build support and momentum over time. But when you’re Chairman, you have more latitude to go big right off the bat. And it’s a lot more fun to go big.

One way we’re taking a big picture approach at the new FCC is an across-the-board review of our media rules. We want to identify which ones are working, which need to be modified, and which need to be scrapped altogether. As you surely know, the FCC’s media regulations offer some ripe candidates for pruning. That’s because there are around *one thousand* pages of them on the books, many of them decades old.

Last month, the FCC launched a comprehensive review of our media regulations. Our goal is clear: We want to figure out how to update our rules to match the realities of today’s media marketplace. We want to modernize our regulations in order to better promote the public interest and to clear a path for more competition, innovation, and investment in the media sector.

For this effort to be successful, we’ll need broadcasters to participate. We want to hear which rules you think should be modified or repealed as part of this review, and why. Comments are due on July 5, and reply comments are due on August 4. We’ll then study the record to determine which regulations to propose modifying or eliminating.

One of the most powerful forces in government is inertia. With your help, we can shake up the status quo and relax outdated rules that have been gumming up the works for broadcasters for too long.

But we’re not going to wait for this review to conclude to start addressing rules that might need changing. One such regulation is the so-called main studio rule, which requires each AM, FM, and television broadcast station to maintain a main studio that is located in or near its community of license.

The Commission first adopted main studio requirements almost 80 years ago. And the idea behind this rule made sense way back when. Local access to a station’s main studio enabled the public to give broadcasters their input and to review a station’s public inspection file.

I still believe it’s important for Americans to be able to share feedback with local broadcasters and have access to their public inspection files. But technology has changed how they can and do that. It’s pretty rare for someone to visit physical studios these days—perhaps even more rare than an escalator in Wyoming. Nowadays, if you want to contact your local station, you are much more likely to do so by social media, email, or phone call. And broadcasters’ public inspection files are either currently available or soon will be available online.

Last month, at the same meeting where we voted to launch the general review of our media rules, the FCC also proposed eliminating the Commission’s main studio rule for both radio and television broadcasters. In 2017, I am optimistic that we can give broadcasters additional flexibility by repealing the main studio rule without sacrificing transparency or community engagement.

The main studio rule also reveals the power of public comment to shape the FCC’s thinking. One reason I was thinking about the main studio rule is that I heard firsthand from broadcasters about the problems it creates. One broadcaster in Minnesota wrote to me a while back. He said he’d like to build out his construction permit for an AM station in a nearby town, but the “main studio rule is a killer; the cost to maintain a staff—it would make the construction of this facility a ticket of doom.” So, again, please turn on, tune in, and drop by the Commission. Let us know what you think we’re doing right and what we’re doing wrong. Your voice makes a difference.

One issue where we’ve certainly heard a lot from television broadcasters over the last few years is the FCC’s incentive auction. As many of you know, that auction closed earlier this year, and the 39-month post-auction transition process is now underway.

For Wyoming television broadcasters, the FCC shared some good news when it released the auction results. No full-power or Class A television station in the state needs to repacked. (Obviously, our lives at the FCC would be much easier over the course of the next three years if every state were like Wyoming.)

But that doesn’t mean that the post-incentive auction process won’t impact your state. It’s likely that some low-power television stations and translators will be displaced during the repack. I know that these stations play an important role in your communities, delivering major network programming and public broadcasting to many Wyomingites.

Since 2012, I’ve focused on the importance of the FCC doing what it can within the constraints of the law to minimize the impact of the incentive auction on low-power television stations and translators. I want to reiterate this morning that we will work to find new homes for as many of these displaced stations as possible. We will use all tools at our disposal to find spectrum for displaced Wyoming low-power television stations and translators so that they can continue serving the citizens of Wyoming.

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Let me close with this. It’s fair to say that former Vice President Dick Cheney is probably the most widely recognized public official from Wyoming. Or maybe Harrison Ford, if you count his stint as President in *Air Force One*.

But few statesmen from Wyoming—or any state—cast a longer shadow than Senator Alan Simpson. And having met him, I mean that literally; he was the tallest member of the Senate at six-foot-five. As Wyoming’s broadcasters, you surely know and appreciate that you could always count on Senator Simpson for a colorful quote. One that’s stood the test of time: “If you torture statistics long enough, they’ll eventually confess the truth.”

But in this setting, I’m reminded of one of the Senator’s most cited quotes: “If you have integrity, nothing else matters. If you don’t have integrity, nothing else matters.” That brings me to the most important thing I want to say to you today. It’s something more important than any checklist of issues. I will always do my best to shoot straight with you and to fight for the values broadcasters embody: localism, free speech, and public service. That’s what matters most. We may not always end up on the same page. But please know that I aim to be an honest broker as we work together to advance the public interest, which includes a healthy broadcasting industry.

Thank you. And now, I’m off to Taco John’s.