

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
AT THE FIRST MEETING OF THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION'S
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON DIVERSITY AND DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT**

WASHINGTON, DC

SEPTEMBER 25, 2017

Good morning, and happy Monday. More important, happy Hispanic Heritage Month. I think today's meeting is a fitting commemoration.

A few days ago, I found myself addressing the student body at my alma mater, Parsons High School. Among other things, I told them I never anticipated having an opportunity to serve in a position like this when I was a gangly, awkward student in the 1980s. That was partly because I didn't know that was possible; I never saw people who looked like me in these positions. As I looked around in the auditorium, I saw the full spectrum of America, so to speak—white, black, Latino, Asian students, boys and girls. My message to them was that they should never let their horizons be limited by who they are.

Today, those horizons are more dependent than ever before on communications and technology. This sector can empower Americans in so many ways—as a gateway for jobs, services, and more. That's why it's so important for all Americans to have a chance to participate in and benefit from this sector.

That's where the FCC comes in. On my first full day as Chairman, I spoke to the Commission's staff in this very room. I said then that my highest priority would be bringing the benefits of the digital age to all Americans—regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or anything else. Normally, that would mean that the FCC would get input from our Advisory Committee on Diversity. After all, the Diversity Committee back in 2009 identified the digital divide as a critical issue. It called on the FCC to “take proactive steps to close the digital divide.” And it urged us to “closely analyze how its broadband policy or rulemaking proposals [would] impact the digital divide.”

But there was just one small problem. When I entered this position, the Diversity Committee was no more. It hadn't met since 2013, having been disbanded under the prior Administration. That didn't work for me, so I decided to re-charter the Committee. And so, after a four-year hiatus, the FCC's Diversity Advisory Committee, first established in 2003 by Chairman Powell, is back.

There are a number of people I need to thank for getting us to this point. First, thank you to our dedicated Media Bureau staff for their hard work in getting this committee off the ground. And special thanks to Jamila Bess Johnson and Brenda Villanueva for leading this team effort.

I'd also like to thank Julia Johnson for stepping up to serve as Chair of the Committee. Julia served previously as Chairwoman of this Committee. So when I say that I know she'll do a great job, I *know* she'll do a great job, because she's already done it before.

Thank you to Diane Sutter for agreeing to serve as the Committee's Vice Chair. And thank you as well to those who will serve as the leaders of our working groups: Heather Gate, Director of Digital Inclusion for Connected Nation; Marc Morial, President and CEO of the National Urban League; and Henry Rivera, Senior Advisor to the Emma Bowen Foundation and someone who, I should add, is also a former Chair of the full Advisory Committee.

Finally, thanks to all of you for volunteering your valuable time to take a laboring oar on this important mission. I'm grateful to you for bringing your talents and dedication to bear upon diversity issues and for agreeing to serve for two years on this advisory committee.

But we didn't bring you here solely to pat you on the back. We recruited you to put you to work. As members of the Committee, your mission is to offer guidance so that the agency can take important

steps toward increasing diversity throughout the communications industry and bringing digital opportunity to all Americans.

One of your tasks will be to identify issues that might not already be on the FCC's radar. Another will be to advise us about issues that we've already identified.

For example, there is bipartisan support at the Commission for establishing an incubator program to support the entry of new and diverse voices into the broadcast industry. But there are still significant questions about what an effective program would look like. Who would be eligible to participate? What activities would qualify? What benefits would be given to existing broadcasters that agree to serve as incubators? I hope you can help provide some answers as well as come up with other recommendations for fostering diversity in broadcast ownership and management.

Another task we'll assign you is to examine how we can make sure that disadvantaged communities have access to next-generation networks. Broadband can be a great equalizer when it comes to jobs, health care, education, and civic engagement. But if we don't bridge the digital divide, communities on the wrong side of that divide will fall further behind in each of these areas. Our goal should be ubiquitous, high-speed networks that bring together all Americans—and I do mean all Americans.

Last but not least, we'll ask you to take a hard look at diversity in Silicon Valley. Many sectors in our nation's communications industry have made significant strides when it comes to diversity, but the tech sector in Silicon Valley is lagging behind. For too long, women, African-Americans, and Latinos in particular have struggled with underemployment and a lack of promotion opportunities in the tech sector. Silicon Valley needs to do better. We hope that this Committee will study the topic, highlight best practices of industry leaders in this field, and share insights on how businesses can address these challenges.

Clearly, you've got a lot on your plate, so I'll stop talking so you can get to work. But, before I go, thank you once again for volunteering your time and expertise to be part of this endeavor. I look forward to working with you to increase diversity throughout the communications industry and to bring digital opportunity to all Americans.