

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI**

Re: *Promoting Telehealth in Rural America*, WC Docket No. 17-310.

Often in the early mornings, starting in the late 1970s, a urologist in the small town of Parsons, Kansas would hit the road. He would drive long distances across southeast Kansas to make sure that patients in surrounding small communities could see a specialist who could help them. That was my dad. And even into adulthood, I remain amazed at the road miles he's logged.

It's becoming harder to recruit doctors to serve rural communities. It's becoming harder to keep rural hospitals afloat. And so it's becoming harder for many rural patients to get health care—ironically, at a moment when vital signs for those patients and rural America generally are suggesting trouble.

That's what makes the combination of the Internet and rural medicine—call it telemedicine or telehealth if you like—so critical. With a broadband connection, health care providers in small-town America can deliver the same quality of health care as those in our nation's big cities.

The FCC can and does promote this potential. Our Rural Health Care program helps health care providers afford the connectivity that they need to better serve patients. But it's facing some real problems.

First, the program is oversubscribed. The yearly demand for funding now exceeds the annual spending cap. And second, there may be substantial waste, fraud, and abuse in the program. Recent enforcement activity has shown it is all too easy for unscrupulous companies to manipulate the system for their own profit at the expense of the American taxpayer and the rural health care providers that truly need support.

So in this *Notice*, we tackle two key issues: what size the program should be going forward, and how it can function more efficiently. Every dollar in this program needs to be stretched as far as possible to help those in need in places like Southeast Kansas.

Thank you to the staff who have worked on this item. Specifically, Dana Bradford, Regina Brown, Soumitra Das, MaryBeth DeLuca, Trent Harkrader, Radhika Karmarker, Dev Kori, Paul Lafontaine, Belford Lawson, Billy Layton, Jonathan Lechter, Travis Litman, Rick Mallen, Elizabeth McCarthy, Maura McGowan, Avis Mitchell, Kris Monteith, Linda Oliver, Ryan Palmer, Rakesh Patel, Carol Pomponio, Eric Ralph, Bill Richardson, Arielle Roth, David Sobotkin, Geoffrey Waldau, and Preston Wise.