

REMARKS OF FCC COMMISSIONER BRENDAN CARR

AT JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY ROUNDTABLE ON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING IN THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY SECTORS

JACKSON, MS

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Good morning. Thank you to Dr. William Bynum and Jackson State University for hosting today's roundtable on workforce development and training in the telecommunications and technology sectors. I would also like to thank Senator Roger Wicker for inviting me to join him in the Magnolia state and for his leadership in promoting policies that will help create jobs.

It is also great to be joined this morning by the innovators, educators, and advocates on the roundtable—all of whom are focused on developing a strong tech workforce here in Mississippi. I welcome the chance to participate in today's event and learn from their perspectives.

Let me begin by taking a few minutes to explain why, as a Commissioner at the FCC, I believe this discussion is so important. When I think about broadband, I think about the jobs and opportunities it creates for millions of Americans around the country. It's one of the reasons I'm focused in my role at the FCC on policies that will promote broadband deployment. Whether it's the workers that manufacture and deploy broadband infrastructure, the app economy that runs over high-speed networks, or the businesses that use these connections to reach customers around the world, broadband can harness the talents of all Americans, create good-paying jobs, and help drive our nation's economic growth.

I have seen this first-hand in my time as a Commissioner. On my first official trip, I visited a manufacturing plant in the small town of Claremont, North Carolina, that produces fiber optic cables and other network infrastructure. I had the chance to tour the plant floor and meet some of the highly-skilled men and women that operate the machines that produce cables used for everything from data centers to wireless and wireline deployments. Since then, I have visited high-tech manufacturing facilities across the country—from California to Texas to Maryland.

In my time at the FCC, I have also had the chance to visit with construction crews that were hard at work trenching conduit, pulling fiber, and maintaining the towers needed to deliver high-speed broadband. And I have spent time with innovators and entrepreneurs in tech hubs that are taking advantage of all this broadband infrastructure to launch new businesses. These experiences only underscore the important role that broadband plays in creating good jobs for Americans across the country.

Incentivizing greater broadband deployment is especially important as we make the transition to the fifth generation of wireless technology, or 5G. This technology is not just about faster download speeds. 5G has the potential to increase competition in the broadband market, expand Internet access—including through new, fixed wireless offerings—and connect billions of devices. 5G networks could also transform entire industries—with use cases ranging from self-driving vehicles to new telehealth applications.

If we get the right policies in place, 5G deployments could mean three million new jobs across the country, including 50,000 new construction jobs each year during network buildout. But the current regulatory regime is not designed to support or process the type of massive new deployment necessary to

get this transition to 5G across the finish line. So we need to reform our permitting process and regulatory structures. The FCC, alongside Senator Wicker and his colleagues in Congress, have been focused on doing just that—looking at ways to modernize the federal, state, and local regimes that govern infrastructure deployment to make sure our regulatory structures are 5G Ready.

But today's event highlights another piece of the puzzle: the skills gap. While the unemployment rate in Mississippi is at an all-time low, there is even more we can do to ensure that everyone can benefit from the country's economic recovery. That is where apprenticeships and workforce development programs like the ones we're discussing today come into play.

I will give you an example. Last year, I participated in a roundtable hosted by the Wireless Infrastructure Association outside of Baltimore, Maryland. A broad range of stakeholders all agreed that there is a shortage of workers with the skills necessary to deploy and maintain the small cells, distributed antenna systems, and other network infrastructure for 5G deployments. The skills gap comes up repeatedly in my meetings with both wireless and wireline providers.

It is a challenge. But it is also an opportunity. What I have learned is that apprenticeship programs like the ones we will be discussing today can help close this gap by combining classroom learning with on-the-job training. This approach can lead to good-paying jobs while meeting employers' growing demands for specific skill sets or credentials.

While there is no direct regulatory role for the FCC, I welcome the chance to lend my support to these efforts. Last year, for instance, I participated in an event at the U.S. Department of Labor that highlighted the opportunities for apprenticeships in the wireless industry.

Senator Wicker has also been leading the way on these issues. His Apprenticeship Enhancement Act would make it easier for employers to create an apprenticeship program or update an existing one by streamlining the application and approval processes and thus removing layers of unnecessary government red tape.

Through efforts like these, we can help ensure that all Americans have an opportunity to develop the skills needed to participate in the digital economy. So I am glad that everyone in this room is taking an active role in supporting these programs, and I am happy to find ways we can continue to work together so that every American has a fair shot at participating in this new economy.

Thank you.