

**REMARKS OF
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Good afternoon. It is a privilege to be here in Boston at the 86th annual meeting of the United States Conference of Mayors. I'm a native New Englander—in fact I was born in this city—so for those from afar, welcome to my corner of the country. I'm glad to be here, too, because though I serve in our nation's capital I know that when it comes to innovation and public leadership, cities and towns are leading the way. Solutions to some of our most vexing problems are rising up from the local level. You are a force for optimism—and I want to harness your energies this morning to talk about three things we can work on together. First, broadband deployment and the infrastructure challenge it presents for cities. Second, broadband adoption and the challenge it presents for students stuck in what I call the Homework Gap. And third and finally, an update on net neutrality.

So let's get started. Boston and New England have a deep literary tradition. If you are raised here, you spend a lot of time talking about Henry David Thoreau's stay at Walden Pond and Emily Dickinson's prolific poetry. But I want to take you back even further, by borrowing a page from Charles Dickens, and appropriately for this crowd, *A Tale of Two Cities*.

In our first city—which happens to be a fictional one—public infrastructure is dated. The city needs better broadband and wireless services. But city officials view improvements skeptically. They lack the policies and processes needed to clear the way for the deployment of fiber facilities, wireless towers, and small cells—all of which are essential digital age infrastructure. They delay applications for facilities siting. They charge big fees for access to municipal poles. And get this, these bad actors have the audacity to have public safety and aesthetic concerns.

Like I said, this city is fictional. It's a caricature based on some outliers and stitched-together stories. But this city is the one dominating discussion in Washington. It's unfortunately shaping the debate where I work—at the Federal Communications Commission. It's animating our discussions about broadband deployment and how we ensure the next generation of wireless broadband known as 5G reaches everyone, everywhere. This narrative is priming the pump for Washington preempting cities and towns and preventing them from having a role in what is happening in their own backyards.

That brings me to my second city: San Jose. Before I go on, let me make a nod to Mayor Sam Liccardo, who is sitting right here. He sat through discussions of our fictional first city because for a time he was one of the only public officials on the FCC's Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee. But he found there were too few municipal officials at the table. The deck was stacked against them and the group was loath to admit that cities and towns could be something other than impediments to broadband deployment—they could be partners.

So what did this second city do? Well, Mayor Liccardo walked away. He resigned from the FCC Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee. And then he did something important. He decided that he would not let anyone characterize the city of San Jose like our first fictional city. He went to work. He built relationships that resulted in streamlined carrier access to poles for 5G service in exchange for fair compensation. He secured funding for digital inclusion projects that will benefit citizens along with new permitting processes that will benefit service providers. In other words, it is possible to create a solution that delivers value for everyone and all broadband deployment does not have to come at the expense of local control.

In fact, if this second city experience teaches us anything, it's that the fastest and most resilient way to broadband deployment is with a community on board. That's because picking fights with cities and states promises to yield little more than a fast trip to the courts. It's already happening with the FCC's effort to redefine "federal actions" under the National Historic Preservation Act and National Environmental Policy Act.

Like San Jose, we can find a better way. I believe it's time for the FCC to acknowledge that we have a long tradition of local control in this country but also recognize that more uniform policies can help us be first to the future. So here's an idea: let's flip the script and build a new framework. We can begin by developing model codes for small cell and 5G deployment—but we need to make sure they are supported by a wide range of industry and state and local officials. Then we need to review every infrastructure grant program at the Department of Commerce, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Transportation and build in incentives to use this model. In the process, we can build a more common set of practices nationwide. But to do so, we would use carrots instead of sticks.

Moving on through Dickens' classics. *Great Expectations*: when it comes to innovation and public leadership, our cities and towns are setting them. Moreover, *Great Expectations* tells the story of Pip. He's passionate, romantic, and somewhat unrealistic at heart. But above all he wants to become someone.

Today, we have a lot of students in our schools who are like Pip. But many of them lack the tools they need for success.

Let me explain. Today, seven in ten teachers assign homework that requires access to broadband. But FCC data show that as many as one in three households do not subscribe to internet service. Where those numbers overlap is what I call the Homework Gap. It didn't exist for Pip—or for me—growing up. All I needed for homework was a pencil, some paper, and my brother leaving me alone. But gone are the days.

According to the Senate Joint Economic Committee, the Homework Gap is real. By their count, it affects 12 million school-aged kids across the country. And for students in households without broadband, just getting homework done is hard. Applying for a scholarship is challenging. And while low-income families are adopting smartphones with internet access at high rates, let me submit to you that a phone is just not how you want to research and type a paper, apply for jobs, or further your education.

But I have some ideas—and that’s where you come in.

We can start by doing something simple: gathering data and raising awareness. After all, we will never manage problems we do not measure. The good news is that in many cities and school districts measuring the Homework Gap is already underway. Take Hartford, Connecticut, where city leaders have come together to assess the Homework Gap and develop solutions. Or take North Carolina where the Department of Information Technology and Broadband Infrastructure has joined forces with the Friday Institute to report on the problem in the Tar Heel state.

Next, we need to take note of innovative things happening around the country to address this problem—and no shame, copy them. Here’s one example: Libraries from Cherryfield, Maine to Kansas City, Missouri are loaning out wireless hotspots to students, letting them borrow puck-sized mobile devices that give them the connectivity they need at home for basic schoolwork. That loan is important—it can mean the difference between keeping up in class and falling behind.

Here’s another: some communities are installing Wi-Fi routers on district school buses. After all, in rural areas, students often ride the bus an hour to get to school and an hour to get home at night. So these communities turn ride time into connected time for homework. And these buses are hitting the road everywhere from Huntsville, Alabama to Marengo, Illinois to Watkins Glen, New York and many more places in between. It’s a smart idea that deserves attention and support.

And here’s one more: there are a wide range of cities and towns doing something low-cost and low-tech to increase high-tech access. They’re making maps. These maps are designed for students. They show where in town there is free wi-fi so students can do their homework. In some places, the maps are totally predictable—they feature the library and city hall and announce that they are open for schoolwork. But some are not. You see, the act of making these maps can make everyone from small shops to hotel lobbies to insurance offices want to pitch in and offer help. In Winterset, Iowa and Athens, Georgia, they have gone one step further and have offered local businesses a decal to put in the window to indicate they are a connected and safe space for kids to do their homework. Just imagine those decals multiplying around town and the signal it sends to students—we care about you, we want you to succeed, and we will work as a community to help you.

Finally, I want to thank the US Conference of Mayors for your help to preserve an open internet. And if you think that with net neutrality I am running out of Dickens material, well think again. Because in *The Pickwick Papers*, Sergeant Buzfuz addresses a jury by saying “never, in the whole course of his professional experience . . . had he approached a case with . . . such a heavy sense of the responsibility imposed upon him.” That sums it up for me—because with net neutrality the future of the open internet is at stake.

Late last year, the FCC made the misguided decision to roll back our net neutrality rules. They did it over my strenuous objection, over yours, and the objection of 83% of the American public. It saddens me when so many people say those in Washington are not listening to them—

and that with the net neutrality vote you can add the FCC to the list. With this decision, the FCC put itself on the wrong side of history, the wrong side of the law, and the wrong side of the American public.

By taking net neutrality off the books, the FCC gave the legal green light for broadband providers to block websites, throttle services, and censor online content. That is not the open internet we know today and rely on to consume and create. So let's be honest: this is bad.

Now for the good news. This misguided decision awoke a sleeping giant, because the American public is demanding action. As a result, we are seeing states, cities, and towns with new laws, initiatives and executive orders trying to make right what the FCC got wrong. We are seeing litigation. We are seeing legislation. There are efforts everywhere to overturn the mess the agency made. This one's not over. So I'm not giving up—and neither should you.

Let me close here and thank you for your time today—and for the work you do every day to bring technology and innovation to our cities and towns and give every community a fair shot at digital age success.