

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI

Re: *Promoting Telehealth for Low-Income Consumers*, WC Docket No. 18-213.

In a 1962 episode of the futuristic animated series, *The Jetsons*, Elroy complains to his mother, Jane, that he's come down with "Venus Virus" and can't go to school. A skeptical Jane summons the family physician through the push of a button; within seconds, Dr. Racey appears on a videophone to examine Elroy, saving the family a trip to his office.¹ As it turns out, Elroy was simply looking for an excuse to skip his "Space Calculus" exam.

Over fifty years later, this scene no longer seems like fantasy. Indeed, the FCC Chairman back when that *Jetsons* episode aired, Newton Minow, has made waves in recent years explaining how telehealth, of all the broadband-based applications, can make the biggest and most positive difference in American society. He and I recently collaborated to discuss these advances in communications technology.² We talked about the children in Scottsville, Kentucky, a town I visited this year, where the nearest pediatrician is almost 30 miles away. Thanks to a high-speed broadband connection, doctors from Vanderbilt University Children's Hospital can now examine Scottsville students on a video screen and give them an immediate diagnosis.

And telehealth services today go beyond visits from the virtual doctor, as the former Chairman and I observed. Patients can use remote monitoring and mobile health applications through connected devices to track their health and receive care wherever they are. A hospital in rural Virginia uses technology to remotely monitor patients who've left the hospital, dramatically reducing sepsis. The Cleveland Clinic deploys a mobile stroke unit with advanced wireless capability in order to assess and stabilize a patient 38 minutes more quickly than before (vital, since a stroke victim loses 2 million brain cells a minute). And as highlighted in a November 2017 White House report, telemedicine can connect opioid patients to caregivers when there is no other option, with wearable biosensors detecting real-time drug use and alerting a family member or first responder to intervene.³

Broadband-enabled telehealth services like these can significantly improve Americans' health and reduce costs for patients and health care providers alike. But many low-income consumers, especially those in rural areas, lack access to affordable broadband and may not be able to realize these benefits. That's why we're launching an initiative to figure out how the FCC can support the delivery of connected care services to low-income Americans. Specifically, we're exploring a program to promote the use of broadband-enabled telehealth services among low-income families and veterans, with a focus on services delivered directly to patients beyond the doors of brick-and-mortar health care facilities. We're asking for public input on the goals of, and statutory authority for, this "Connected Care" pilot program as well as how best to design the pilot program.

I'd like to thank Commissioner Carr for his leadership on this *Notice of Inquiry*, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to bridge this critical gap in the digital divide. And thank you to the dedicated Commission staff who worked on this item: Kate Dumouchel, Rashann Duvall, James Eisner, Jodie Griffin, Trent Harkrader, Kris Monteith, Ryan Palmer, Eric Ralph, Arielle Roth, Craig Stroup, Tracy Waldon, and Rodger Woock of the Wireline Competition Bureau; and Malena Barzilai,

¹ *The Jetsons: Uniblax* (Hanna-Barbera Productions Nov. 25, 1962), available at <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2y7qxj> at 3:22-5:15.

² Newton N. Minow and Ajit Pai, "In rural America, digital divide slows a vital path for telemedicine," *Boston Globe* (May 21, 2018), available at <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2018/05/20/rural-america-digital-divide-slows-vital-path-for-telemedicine/t8n4ncsfFcUASdf7XLH38J/story.html>.

³ The President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis, at 88 (Nov. 1, 2017), available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/images/Final_Report_Draft_11-1-2017.pdf.

Ashley Boizelle, Richard Mallen, and Linda Oliver of the Office of General Counsel. A healthier America is a better America, and you're helping to make this possible.