

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
AT RIO RANCHO CYBER ACADEMY,
HOSTED BY NEW MEXICO GOVERNOR SUSANA MARTINEZ**

RIO RANCHO, NEW MEXICO

AUGUST 20, 2018

Good afternoon! It's great to be in Rio Rancho. And I promise not to bring up *Breaking Bad*. Even though it's one of my favorite all-time shows, it makes me nervous to discuss it in front of your Superintendent and other distinguished officials.

Speaking of, thank you to Dr. Cleveland and everybody from the Rio Rancho Public Schools for your hospitality. It's an honor to be here.

And thank you, Governor Martinez, for inviting me today. More important, thank you for your leadership on digital learning. Your Broadband for Education Initiative is a model for the nation that is delivering meaningful results. When it launched in 2015, only 65% of New Mexico's students enjoyed sufficient Internet bandwidth at school to support digital learning. Now, that number is up to 99%.

The Rio Rancho Cyber Academy offers a great example of why that connectivity matters—because it shows that digital technologies can open up new opportunities for learning.

You're offering lessons online for your students to watch at home, so your teachers can offer more personalized, tailored instruction during the limited classroom time available. Inverting the classroom in this way is revolutionary.

Of course, this is just one of the ways connected learning promises to transform education.

If your school doesn't offer AP or even college-level classes that interest you, distance learning lets you take those classes at a school that does.

Gamification and game-based tools offer new ways to learn that can be more engaging and effective than traditional methods.

And we've only begun to scratch the potential of new technologies like virtual reality and augmented reality. The possibilities of video simulations are particularly exciting for teaching complex procedures like surgery or exposing students to faraway destinations like Egypt's pyramids or the world's great art museums.

But there is a catch to all this. You can't enjoy the benefits of digital learning tools if you don't have high-speed Internet access. Again, connectivity is what the Governor's Broadband for Education Initiative is all about.

Now, when it comes to connecting all Americans to digital opportunity, we're not where we want or need to be.

As of last year, an estimated 6.5 million students nationwide attended schools that didn't have the Internet bandwidth needed to support digital learning. More than 2,000 schools lacked fiber connections. Notably, 77% of those schools were in rural communities.

And our kids' educational broadband needs extend beyond schools, too. People need to be connected at home, too. For if you want to be a successful student at Rio Rancho Cyber Academy, you must have a home Internet connection to watch the lessons.

According to the latest publicly available data, over 24 million Americans couldn't get fixed broadband service at home at the speeds necessary to support modern education applications and services.

14 million of those Americans on the wrong side of the digital divide live in rural communities. To put that into perspective, less than 2% of Americans living in urban areas lack access to high-speed home broadband. That number jumps to 30% for those in rural America and 36% in Tribal areas.

If there's one message you should take away from my being here today, it's that the FCC is committed to working with educators and state and local leaders across the country to close these connectivity gaps. Our top priority is to close the digital divide—to deliver digital opportunity to all Americans.

A key part of this work is our Connect America Fund, which provided more than \$140 million to connect unserved parts of New Mexico in its previous round of funding. The next phase will deliver up to \$2 billion over the next decade to connect rural America.

And you can't talk about our support for digital learning without talking about the FCC's E-rate program.

E-rate is critical to enabling students and library patrons to get high-speed Internet access. Under Governor Martinez's leadership, New Mexico has been a leader in leveraging the impact of E-rate investment by offering state matching funds. In 2017, New Mexico used \$110 million in E-rate support to help connect more students and lower connectivity costs. This is the kind of partnership that makes a real difference in the lives of learners.

I want you to know that I believe in this program and will continue working with stakeholders like you and folks in Washington to continue improving the E-rate program so that students and library patrons get the support they need.

Let me just close by thanking all of you once again for your work to seize the opportunities of digital learning. You're helping New Mexico's next generation live up to the state motto of *crescit eundo*: "It grows as it goes." As we do the hard work together to connect New Mexico's schools, we know that our children's future will keep growing brighter.