

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI  
AT THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TOWER ERECTORS ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

**GRAPEVINE, TX**

**FEBRUARY 6, 2019**

It's great to be with you this afternoon. And it's great to be at the massive Gaylord Hotel. I guess you have to go big to impress people who work on 2,000-foot towers. Although by Texas standards, I think this qualifies as a B&B.

Thank you for welcoming me to your annual conference. And more importantly, thank you for spending time with me during a difficult period in my life. After all, today should have been the day of my Kansas City Chiefs' first Super Bowl victory parade in 49 years. I'm not saying I would have blown off this important conference to attend that parade. But I'm not saying I wouldn't have, either.

One thing became crystal clear on Sunday night during the game: The American people were the real losers when the New England Patriots beat the Chiefs for the AFC Championship. Just compare the thrilling 54-51 shootout between the Rams and Chiefs on Monday night during Week 11 of the NFL season with the Super Bowl LIII snoozefest. Which game was more entertaining? I rest my case.

But enough about football. I'm excited to make my first appearance at NATE's annual conference. In a further show of the current FCC's commitment to your issues, I understand that Commissioner Carr was also here this week. Thank you for scheduling Commissioner Carr's remarks before mine. You see, lately Brendan seems determined to one-up me whenever possible. Last year, I climbed a 131-foot tower in rural Colorado. (My wife still hasn't forgiven me for not giving her advance notice and a deemed-denied remedy.) A few months later, Brendan went up a 2,000-foot tower. During the government shutdown, I started growing a beard. Next thing I know, Brendan has gone full Duck Dynasty. If Brendan were speaking after me today, I suspect he would have outdone me by bringing the Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders on stage with him.

This may be my first time at your annual conference, but NATE and your members aren't new to me. I've seen you on your turf and understand the challenge of what you do. I already mentioned my venture up that 131-foot Colorado tower last year. In 2018, I also visited NATE member Green Mountain Communications in Pembroke, New Hampshire. Green Mountain's staff showed me the incredibly heavy multi-band antennas and equipment that crews have to lug up towers. Last April, I visited MillerCo in Gulfport, Mississippi. That morning, I learned about the company's work to maintain and repair towers everywhere from Wisconsin to Puerto Rico. In October, I had the chance to return the hospitality when we welcomed MillerCo CEO and your newly elected Chairman of the Board Jimmy Miller at the Commission for a Tower Training workshop. And when I say, "I've visited NATE members on your turf," that includes beyond our shores. A few months ago, I went to a poor neighborhood on the dusty outskirts of New Delhi, India to visit an American Tower cell site. This cell site provides wireless coverage to thousands for whom a mobile phone provides the only digital access to the outside world. And the fiber that feeds the site is used for Internet kiosks that teach poor kids without educational opportunities about math, reading, and the like. That's work that makes a difference. That's NATE. (Oh, I'd like to see Commissioner Carr try to top that visit.)

Even when I'm not meeting with NATE's members, I'm often talking about NATE's issues. On this current trip, for example, I'm visiting the headquarters of AT&T and Ericsson North America—two companies at the forefront of the wireless revolution. In New Orleans, I met with the Louisiana Association of Broadcasters. As these meetings make clear, and as this audience certainly knows, if we want thriving wireless and broadcast industries, we need a thriving tower industry.

I'm constantly meeting with NATE and its members for a very practical reason. Actually, make that two practical reasons: One is the race to 5G and the other is the broadcaster repack stemming from

the FCC's incentive auction. These are two of the top priorities on the FCC's agenda, and it's critical that we tackle the challenges facing your companies if we hope to deliver on these priorities. I'd like to discuss each, starting with 5G.

Everyone in this room, and increasingly people outside this room, understands that when it comes to 5G policy, infrastructure will be essential. That's because 5G requires much more densified networks. For example, we'll need to install hundreds of thousands of small cells—an exponential increase in the number of antenna locations for our current networks.

I've needled him in my remarks today, but Commissioner Carr deserves tremendous credit for spearheading the Commission's efforts to streamline our rules and make it easier for the people in this room to build, maintain, and expand America's wireless networks.

As many of you heard from him, we've made significant progress toward that goal. We reformed our historic preservation and environmental regulations so that small cells don't have to jump through the same regulatory hoops as 200-foot towers. Last August, we advanced a federal one-touch-make-ready policy that will make it quicker and cheaper to build out networks. And this September, we approved an important order promoting 5G infrastructure. It sets a reasonable 60-day shot clock for cities to rule on small-cell siting applications and reasonable limits on siting fees—limits that allow localities to cover their costs.

I appreciate NATE's strong support for our efforts. I hope and expect these actions will make it easier for you to do your jobs and for more people in our county to benefit from the wireless revolution.

With that, I'd like to shift gears and dive into the broadcast repack.

The broadcast incentive auction was one of the most challenging undertakings in FCC history. Most of the people who say that have in mind the mechanics of creating a two-sided auction—taking spectrum used for broadcast TV and repurposing it for wireless services. So there's a broad perception that when the auction closed in April 2017, the hard part was over. But that's not right.

As a result of the incentive auction, roughly half of our nation's broadcast TV stations will be changing their transmission frequencies to clear part of the spectrum for wireless use. We're talking about a channel and/or location change for approximately 1,000 full-power and Class A television broadcasters and about 2,000 low-power and translator television stations.

As you know, these changes don't just happen by somebody flipping a switch or pushing a magic button. No, it happens because the men and women in this room—shoutout to the Women of NATE!—go out and do hard and dangerous work. Simply put, without you, the incentive auction cannot succeed in the end.

The value of this complex and challenging work, performed on the tallest towers in America on a challenging time schedule, can't be overstated. That's why the limited availability of tower crews capable of doing this work was a big factor in our transition planning from the start. We designed a phased transition schedule that allows both tower companies and equipment manufacturers to prioritize stations in early phases and to strategically allocate resources. We built in flexibility to make adjustments so that safety is never compromised.

So how is the transition going? Together with broadcasters, NATE members, equipment manufacturers and other industry stakeholders, we've made great progress since the close of the incentive auction and the start of the transition period in April 2017.

At the conclusion of Phase 1, which ended on November 30 of last year, 143 repacked stations had already moved off their pre-auction channels. By contrast, according our original plan, only 90 stations were supposed to be repacked by the end of Phase 1. That's good news; we're ahead of schedule. Right now, we're in the middle of Phase 2, which ends on April 12, 2019. Thus far, over 20 of the

approximately 115 stations assigned to Phase 2 have moved to their new channel. So, the next two months will busy ones for NATE members.

Not only are we ahead of schedule, we have the resources to do the job. Thanks to the additional \$1 billion provided by Congress last year, we now have a total of \$2.75 billion available to reimburse broadcasters for repack costs. And the Fund Administrator has already approved over \$350 million in reimbursements.

Successfully completing the repack on schedule will require continued coordination between tower companies, equipment manufacturers, broadcasters, and government officials. FCC staff is in daily contact with stakeholders. We're working to make sure that stations are on pace to move by their phase completion dates, to address transition issues that come up, and to help stations as appropriate and when doing so wouldn't impact other repack stations.

The help available for stations that face challenges in completing a channel change is pretty broad. It includes applying to the FCC for a change in its phase deadline, extending a construction permit deadline, temporary operation on an interim facility, temporary use of an alternate channel, or temporary multi-party use of a channel, or temporary increased pairwise interference. In English: We're doing everything we can to keep all transitioning stations on the air for their viewers throughout the transition period.

We've heard concerns from both tower companies and broadcasters that limited tower crew availability and weather delays may make it difficult to meet deadlines in future phases. I encourage tower companies to be proactive. Coordination with stations and equipment manufacturers will be key. Working together, I'm optimistic that we can be as successful as we were in Phase 1 and stay on track to complete this work for full-power and Class A stations by July 2020.

For all this talk of the broadcast repack, I should also note that NATE members are also deploying infrastructure so that wireless carriers can put the licenses awarded to incentive auction winners to use. This deployment is now a reality in many places and is underway in many others. For example, one carrier has already lit up service using 600 MHz spectrum in more than 1,500 cities and 37 states, including Puerto Rico. For many of your members, this is intense, ongoing work. For American consumers, this means new competition and opportunities to benefit from 5G.

To be honest, all of these next-generation wireless networks are doing more than keeping you busy. They're creating an imbalance between the supply of and demand for skilled communications tower technicians. I've heard about this during every visit. It's hard enough finding people with the technical skills to maintain and service communications equipment. It's harder finding people who can do this work hundreds of feet in the air. That's why we need to invest in the training and development of our communications workforce, now and into the future. This would not only boost the economy, it would also help create good-paying jobs all across America.

Along these lines, I'm glad we've seen bipartisan legislation introduced within the past year by Representatives Markwayne Mullin and Dave Loebsack that would establish and expand job training opportunities for tower workers. I want to assure you that the FCC is aware of this challenge and committed to work with Congress, NATE, and others to move the ball forward.

Well, I've talked about 5G, the broadcast repack, and other things. But I want to make clear as I close that even without all this, I'd still be travelling across the country to meet with you and bring your stories, your successes, and your concerns back to the FCC.

I would still be working with you because I believe that the digital revolution is not just about inventors tinkering in their garage or dorm room, it's about work crews climbing towers to install antennas and build the networks of tomorrow.

I would still be working with you because, as much as our society and the media celebrate Silicon Valley whiz-kids as great risk-takers, I'm impressed by the risks taken by the men and women in this room, people who literally put their lives on the line to make digital communications possible.

I would still be working with you because I believe that every American—no matter where he or she lives—should have access to the opportunities of the digital age, and I know that you help make that a reality for often-overlooked rural communities on the wrong side of the digital divide.

And while this might sound cliched, I would still be working with you because you remind me of home. I grew up in a town called Parsons in the southeast corner of Kansas, population 9,800. When I visit businesses like MillerCo or Green Mountain Communications, when I go to small towns served by NATE members around this country, it's a familiar feeling. I'm meeting people who love where they live and want to make America a better place. Sure, they care about their bottom line, but they also care about their neighbors and they realize that their companies play a critical role in promoting the public good. You are in the infrastructure business. You build things—both literally and figuratively. You help make the foundation of communities like Parsons, Kansas stronger. For that, I am grateful. And as long as I'm at the FCC, I'll roll up my sleeves and work with you to expand digital opportunity to all corners of this country.