

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI  
AT THE GEORGIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

**ATLANTA, GA**

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It's an honor to be with you. And I'm not going to lie: it's a little bit humbling to be in the presence of one of my childhood heroes—the Human Highlight Film, and a man I'm proud to call a friend, NBA Hall of Famer and Atlanta Hawks all-time great Dominique Wilkins.

Before today, the most famous athlete I'd met as FCC Chairman was someone people in Atlanta know well—legendary Detroit Lions wide receiver Calvin Johnson. Today, Dominique Wilkins takes that crown from Megatron. I think this makes Dominique 4-and-0 in his career against Georgia Tech.

I'm looking forward to today's fireside chat with Dominique and Dr. Turner-Lee. But before we get started, I'd like to give a brief high-level overview of the FCC's priorities and activities since I became Chairman in January 2017.

On my first full day on the job, I convened a meeting of the FCC's staff. I told them that our number one priority would be closing the digital divide and bringing the benefits of the Internet age to all Americans.

I was trying to think of a metaphor to illustrate the costs of being on the wrong side of the digital divide. And one, in particular, came to mind. Who here remembers the 1988 Slam Dunk Contest between Dominique and Michael Jordan during NBA All-Star Weekend? Now, who remembers where the 1988 slam dunk contest was held? That's right: Chicago. After perfect 50s on his first two dunks of the final round, Dominique had the lead going into the last dunk. He only needed a 48 or better to clinch the title. He executed his best dunk yet—a two-handed windmill—but somehow was only given a score of 45, clearing the way for MJ to win in front of the home crowd.

What's my point? It wasn't a level playing field. (Or, as the 15-year-old me might have said, "Dominique was robbed!") For Dominique to win that day, he would have had to meet a far higher standard than the one faced by his very capable competitor.

The same thing goes with digital access. In 2019, if you can't get online, the field is tilted against you—whether you're a student, entrepreneur, a farmer, or someone with a chronic healthcare issue.

To highlight this digital divide, I've made it a point to get out of Washington, D.C., whenever I can. I've seen firsthand the ways that digital technologies are transforming communities. And I've also seen how the lack of Internet access is creating problems for the people and places being bypassed by the broadband revolution.

To date, I've visited 43 states and two territories, driving more than 11,000 road miles in some hard-working rental cars. One of my stops along the way was Dahlonega, Georgia, population 6,500. I participated in a townhall on the campus of the University of North Georgia with Congressman Doug Collins, local leaders, small business owners, and many others. This week in Atlanta, I'm adding other visits, including stops at Techstars Atlanta; digitalundivided, an incubator for woman and minority-owned startups; and Rimidi, a health technology company. All across the country, I keep hearing the same message: We need broadband for jobs and economic development. We need broadband for education. We need broadband for healthcare. We need broadband to have a chance to achieve the American Dream.

How are we working to deliver that? What is the FCC doing to bridge the digital divide?

It starts with a recognition of reality. Next-generation broadband networks require tens of billions of dollars a year in private investment. And bureaucratic red tape at all levels of government can slow the pace and increase the cost of network deployment. We recognize that these networks don't have to be built, and too often aren't. That's why, across the board, the FCC has been working hard to modernize its regulations. We want to encourage the private sector to build wired and wireless broadband infrastructure.

To help promote wired infrastructure like fiber, the FCC has made it easier and cheaper for broadband providers to access utility poles. We've also made it easier for companies to transition from yesterday's copper networks to tomorrow's fiber networks. We recognize that every dollar that's spent propping up copper can't be spent installing fiber.

On the wireless side, we've made clear that small antennas won't face the same federal historic preservation and environmental reviews that we require of 200-foot cell towers. We set a reasonable shot clock for cities to rule on small-cell siting applications (don't worry, it's longer than 24 seconds). And we adopted reasonable limits on siting fees charged by municipalities while still allowing them to cover their costs. I should confess here that I know all of this sounds pretty boring, but studies have found that these wireless infrastructure reforms will cut deployment costs by billions of dollars.

In addition to encouraging private investment, we also want new competitors to enter the market. That's why we've given the green light to companies that want to send thousands of satellites into low-Earth orbit to provide high-speed broadband. These new networks promise much faster and more reliable satellite broadband services and could help us reach our nation's hardest-to-serve areas. We've also freed up more spectrum for fixed wireless companies to use to provide competitive alternatives.

We also recognize that there are certain high-cost, low-population areas where the economic incentives for private investment just don't exist. To connect those areas, the FCC runs a subsidy program called the Universal Service Fund. Under this program, we provide direct funding that leverages—not displaces—private capital expenditures. We've reformed this program to make sure that we get the most bang for our buck. For example, we shouldn't subsidize companies in areas already covered by private investment when other areas have no access at all.

I'm pleased to report that this strategy appears to be working. By almost every meaningful metric, America's broadband networks have been expanding and improving.

For example, 2018 was a record-breaking year for fiber deployment in the United States, with buildout to nearly six million additional homes. And we've seen significant increases in broadband speeds. Last year, according to a report from Ookla, the average fixed broadband download speed in the United States increased by more than 35% over the prior year. And after network investment by broadband providers declined for two straight years at the end of the prior Administration, it is once again on the rise.

If bridging the digital divide has been our number one priority at the Commission, it's fair to say that promoting technological innovation is number 1A. I don't have time to get into all the details of what we're doing, but I wanted to briefly highlight our work to promote the next generation of wireless connectivity, which we call 5G.

These networks will be 100 times faster, maybe even more. They will have lag times that are a tenth of what they are today. And they'll have much more capacity, being able to connect as many as 1 million devices per square kilometer.

This will open the door to new services and applications that will grow our economy and improve our standard of living. Smart transportation networks that link connected cars—reducing traffic, preventing accidents, and limiting pollution. Ubiquitous wireless sensors that enable healthcare

professionals to remotely monitor your health and transmit data to your doctor before problems become emergencies. Connected devices that empower farms to apply precision agriculture.

These breakthroughs will boost our economy. One study pegs 5G's potential at three million new jobs, \$275 billion in private investment, and \$500 billion in new economic growth.

To promote U.S. leadership in 5G the FCC has been pursuing what we call the 5G FAST plan. The approach includes three key components: freeing up spectrum, promoting wireless infrastructure, and modernizing regulations. Many of these infrastructure policies overlap with our efforts to bridge the digital divide, so I won't go into more detail here. But on the spectrum front, I think it's worth noting that, earlier this year, the FCC successfully concluded bidding on the United States' first auction of millimeter wave airwaves for 5G services. This auction awarded nearly 3,000 licenses and raised more than \$700 million in winning bids. Just last week, we started the bidding in a second auction of millimeter wave spectrum in the 24 GHz band. And later this year, we will be holding an auction of the 37 GHz, 39 GHz, and 47 GHz spectrum bands. All told, we are making available almost five gigahertz of spectrum for commercial use. To put that in perspective, that is more spectrum than is currently used for terrestrial mobile broadband by all wireless service providers combined.

Again, I'm pleased to report that the indicators suggest our 5G strategy is working. This past month, Cisco released a report that said that three years from now, the share of 5G wireless connections in North America will be twice the projected rate for Asia. Notably, Cisco credits the U.S. government's policy decisions with America's leadership position. A Cisco representative said, "The U.S. has made a good start in changing policies to support the deployment of 5G . . . [A]s we look around the rest of the world, policy changes of the type we've seen here in the U.S. have not yet happened."

We're still much closer to the opening tipoff than the final buzzer on 5G, so nobody is claiming victory yet. But the U.S. is in a very good position. And you can be assured that promoting U.S. leadership in 5G will be at the top of the FCC's innovation agenda for the foreseeable future.

As I said earlier, I've traveled to 43 states to interact with and learn from Americans in their communities, not to lecture them. In that same spirit, I'm going to wrap up my remarks there. Let me just thank you for welcoming me today. I look forward to hearing from you and working with you to expand digital opportunity to all Americans as we move forward.