

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
AT THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ATTORNEYS GENERAL
CONSUMER PROTECTION SPRING CONFERENCE**

WASHINGTON, DC

MAY 20, 2019

Before I go further, a humble request: could everybody please turn off their cell phones? Otherwise, the odds that our time together gets disrupted by a robocall over the next 45 minutes are somewhere between 99 and 100%.

Thank you to the National Association of Attorneys General for inviting me to be here today. More important, thank you for all of your work to fight the scourge of unwanted robocalls. I was particularly encouraged to see that 40 state AGs formed a bipartisan Robocall Technologies Working Group. (I can't comment on the rumor that the other 10 AGs are Game of Thrones fans who have been waiting for the show to conclude before signing on.)

The collaboration shown through the working group and on this panel is important, because nobody can solve this problem alone. Scammers are nifty as well as shifty; they are often ahead of the curve technically. That makes this a complex challenge that will require a comprehensive response. And the sheer volume of robocalls has gotten to the point that a lot of consumers feel compelled to never answer the phone anymore. And consumers' complaints to the FCC about robocalls for years have remained the top category of complaints that we get.

The good news is that we're all locked in on this issue: the FCC, all of you, the Federal Trade Commission, Congress, consumer advocates, and many private carriers. Working together, I'm hopeful that we can reverse the trends and make a real dent in this problem.

Karen Schroeder is here from the FCC to fill you in on all the details of what we're doing. But I'd like to briefly give you a high-level overview of our work.

Since becoming Chairman, I've said repeatedly that combatting unwanted robocalls is our top consumer protection priority, and we've backed up that talk with action. We've authorized carriers to block robocalls from certain spoofed numbers. We've authorized the creation of a reassigned numbers database. We've demanded that phone carriers establish a robust call-authentication framework by the end of this year. We've taken aggressive enforcement action against those who unleash robocalls on consumers. And we have been working with Congress to pass much-needed bipartisan, anti-robocall legislation, like the TRACED Act and the STOP Robocalls Act.

Next month, the FCC is poised to take what may be the biggest step yet.

Last week, I shared with my colleagues my proposal to allow phone companies to establish call-blocking services as a default setting for consumers. That is, phone companies could block robocalls for consumers without consumers having to proactively sign up for it. Companies that do this would use analytics to determine which calls to block—the same general approach as the current crop of call blocking apps, and similar to what email providers do when they direct junk messages into consumers' spam folders. To offer call-blocking by default, carriers would have to simply allow consumers who don't want these services to opt out. If adopted and implemented, I believe my proposal would make a big dent in the number of robocalls consumers get and help fight back against scams that rely on robocalls and spoofing.

In addition, carriers would be allowed to offer consumers the option of using their own contact list as a "white list." That is, once carriers adopt this technology, consumers could ask their carrier to

block all calls that come from people who aren't on their own phone's contact list. If a caller wasn't already on that list, the call would be blocked.

One possible use for this would be in support of elderly relatives, who are too often targets of robocall scams. Imagine being able to set up a list of phone numbers that your grandmother or grandfather would receive calls from. This would allow them to know that the calls they get are coming from trusted people: loved ones, their doctor, Pat Sajak, and the like.

Now, my proposals on call-blocking by default and a white list are part of what's called a Declaratory Ruling. This basically announces what the FCC considers the law in this area to be.

In addition to the Declaratory Ruling, I've teed up a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking related to call-blocking. Here, I'm proposing a safe harbor for carriers that block phone calls that aren't properly authenticated under the caller ID technical framework that's being developed, called SHAKEN/STIR.

Lastly, it's important to note that these proposals make very clear that emergency and other vital calls cannot be blocked, and that carriers must give consumers ample information about these services and methods.

If adopted, we expect carriers to quickly begin offering call-blocking services by default and to work toward more advanced offerings like blocking based on contact lists.

I hope my FCC colleagues will join me in working to reduce the number of illegal robocalls that reach consumers and restore consumers' trust in caller ID.

With that, thank you again for the opportunity to be here today. I look forward to working with all of you to give American consumers some respite from what the late Senator Fritz Hollings once called the "scourge of civilization."