REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
USTELECOM FORUM: TURNING THE TIDE ON ILLEGAL ROBOCALLS

WASHINGTON, DC

JUNE 11, 2019

Good morning! You've had two hours this morning to address America's robocall challenge, so I'm sure that the problem's already been solved.

On a more serious note, I'd like to thank USTelecom for allowing me to close today's festivities. And I'd also like to thank our host for your leadership on the robocall challenge, which goes beyond today's forum.

USTelecom has been particularly helpful in making sure that we can quickly trace scam robocalls to their originating source. More than two years ago, USTelecom formed a group to share information among carriers and make it easier to trace back calls. You've also been an important ally in promoting broad industry participation in these "traceback" efforts.

I'd also like to thank the many other leaders in the fight against robocalls who spoke this morning: Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member Walden, Ranking Member Latta, Senator Markey, and Chairman Simons of the Federal Trade Commission. I appreciate all that they are doing to combat the robocall scourge. I'd also like to pay tribute to Kristi Thompson of the FCC's Enforcement Bureau, who participated on a panel earlier. Kristi does a great job leading the Telecommunications Consumers Division. This is the FCC division that is dedicated to going after those who make illegal robocalls and unlawfully spoof caller ID information.

The impressive lineup for today's event is a direct reflection of the challenge that we're facing. To make a meaningful dent in the robocall challenge, each and every one of us will have to do our part. And from the looks of today's event, I think we're up to the challenge.

At the FCC, we're doing our fair share.

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.

Just last week, for example, we adopted a declaratory ruling that gives phone companies the legal clarity they need to establish call-blocking services as a default setting for consumers. I appreciate USTelecom's strong support for our action. And my main message this morning to USTelecom's members is simple: "It's your turn."

Now that the FCC has given you the legal clarity to block unwanted robocalls more aggressively, it's time for voice service providers to implement call blocking by default as soon as possible. But you don't need to listen to me. This is about listening to your customers. Consumers have had it with robocalls. And I can think of few things you could do to make your customers happier than curbing these unwanted calls.

Speaking of our vote last week, the FCC also took an important step toward ensuring that voice service providers implement the SHAKEN/STIR caller ID authentication framework, an important step in combatting spoofed robocalls. Since last year, I've been clear that I expect major voice service providers to implement SHAKEN/STIR by the end of 2019. I've also stated that the quickest and smoothest way to get this done is through a voluntary, industry-led process, and that I've been encouraged by the progress that has been made to date. But I've also made clear that if this deadline is not met, the FCC will act to ensure that SHAKEN/STIR is implemented.

That's why last week the FCC took the necessary steps to put us in a position to adopt new rules early next year if the deadline isn't met. I remain hopeful that industry will get the job done on time and that new rules will not be necessary. But as President Reagan said, our approach will be: "Trust, but verify."

We also proposed last week to give a "safe harbor" to phone companies that block calls lacking proper caller ID authentication. This could not only give consumers more relief from spoofed robocalls, but also give voice service providers an additional incentive to implement SHAKEN/STIR promptly.

Speaking of implementing SHAKEN/STIR, we'll be hosting a summit at the FCC on July 11, where we'll seek information from carriers about where they stand on the implementation of this authentication framework. I encourage all USTelecom members to participate.

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I'd like to close with this thought. I don't know how many of you have been watching the NBA Finals. Even if you have, you may not realize that history was made in Game 2. Golden State was down a game; down five points at halftime; and down Kevin Durant, who most believe is their all-around best player. They were able to come from behind and win on the road largely because Golden State assisted on all 22 of its field goals in the second half. That's right: 22 field goals on 22 assists. For context, the league's leading scorer, James Harden, once scored 304 points in a row this season without a single assist. Here's my point. Nobody is going to fix this problem playing hero-ball. Everybody needs to do his or her part. And when your time to step up comes, you will need to execute. We need to work as one team. If and when we do, we'll finally curb the robocall problem and give consumers some peace of mind.

This past week, the FCC passed the ball to industry. Let's see what you can do.