

REMARKS OF FCC COMMISSIONER BRENDAN CARR

AT THE WIA FOUNDATION AWARDS

“HONORING 5G BUILDERS”

WASHINGTON, D.C.

OCTOBER 1, 2019

Thank you for the kind introduction, David. And thank you to the WIA Foundation for its efforts to make opportunities in building 5G infrastructure available to so many Americans. It’s an honor to join with Congressman Guthrie and Congresswoman Matsui to receive your Workforce Champion recognition tonight.

With the Nats playing in the N.L. wildcard game just down the road, I can see that many of the wireless infrastructure leaders in the room are refreshing your phones for the latest score—or, as you might put it, real-time testing your networks. In all seriousness, I’ll be an efficient closer and get you out before the end of the inning.

As some of you know, I’ve spent much of the last year on the road. I’ve been in Connecticut and Rhode Island in the last few weeks, which were states 32 and 33 since I’ve been a Commissioner. I arrived back from Texas this afternoon—my seventh trip to the Lone Star State. There’s no better way to learn how our policies can benefit everyday Americans than hearing directly from them.

One thing I’ve seen firsthand is how 5G is creating jobs in communities around the country. Now, the types of jobs I’m talking about might not be the first ones you picture when you hear “5G”—zip-up sweatshirts and lattes, dual keyboards and Beats headphones. The 5G workers I’ve met tend to wear hardhats and harnesses. They work with their hands. They scale towers and string fiber. Without their work, none of the other 5G jobs and opportunities would exist.

With all of these new 5G builds underway, industry could now fill 20,000 job openings for tower techs. These are good-paying jobs that could bring thousands of families into the middle class. They’re skilled jobs, but they don’t require an expensive four-year degree.

In South Carolina this spring, I met two young men who are studying to become tower climbers. Michael and Caleb told me that they didn’t always follow the straight and narrow. They both dropped out of high school. They didn’t know which way they wanted to go in life. But they found their way to Aiken Technical College and a shot at a career. When I climbed a practice tower with them, they were at the end of their 12-week program. That day, they both received job offers—as did every single one of their classmates. The path to the top of the tower and up in life was there for them.

Standing up Aiken’s Tower Installation Program was no small feat. It necessitated writing a new curriculum, soliciting equipment donations from tower companies, and applying for certain accreditation through the Labor Department. Gemma Frock and the team at Aiken deserve immense credit for bootstrapping the program in the early days. I commend WIA for identifying and helping to stand up Aiken’s program. Gemma has been willing to share Aiken’s experience with educators in other regions, and I am now working with stakeholders on a 5G jobs initiative that will launch similar programs at other trade schools. I was just in Sioux Falls, South Dakota a few weeks ago and spoke with the administrators who are working to stand up a new tower tech program at Southeast Tech.

The young tower climbers literally building 5G with their hands, the visionary educators who saw a need and invented their own solution, the family companies who have donated training and equipment—their stories are inspiring. And bringing their stories back to Washington to help strengthen their momentum—to expand the opportunities for 5G workers—has been a privilege. All of which makes tonight’s award feel somewhat misplaced.

In fact, this thought has crossed my mind before. The women and men who build next-gen infrastructure deserve the awards and our recognition. So a few months ago, I started a process for doing just that. I have been recognizing some of the inspiring 5G workers I’ve met with an honorary “5G-Ready Hardhat.” I started by recognizing Shama Ray for her tower work and leadership for women in wireless.¹ And I thought that tonight, while we’re all gathered here to celebrate the people who build wireless infrastructure, it would be most appropriate to honor two more of America’s finest tower climbers, Brandon and Ammon.

[[Video](#)]

Thank you again to the WIA Foundation for inviting me this evening. Congratulations to Brandon and Ammon, and the thousands of tower climbers who are most deserving of recognition and praise. And here’s to the Nationals putting one more curly W in the record books tonight.²

¹ Carr Recognizes Tower Climber Shama Ray with First ‘5G Ready’ Hard, available at <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-358506A1.pdf>.

² Note that they did: <https://twitter.com/Nationals/status/1179232095945859073?s=20>.