

**REMARKS OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS
FUTURE OF WORK ROUNDTABLE
WASHINGTON, DC
FEBRUARY 11, 2020**

Thank you for joining me here at the Future of Work Roundtable this afternoon. We have such an excellent group of participants present today who are ready to discuss both their unique and shared perspectives about this pressing issue. I'm so very thankful that you all took time out of your busy schedules to join me at the FCC today.

You all have probably heard an often cited phrase: "the personal is political." And for me that is true in the policy areas that I advocate for most often including broadband affordability, network security, diversity in media ownership, facial recognition and the list goes on. It is also true in discussions about the future of work because the fear, the anxiety, and the trepidation about this issue often times lies with our most marginalized communities.

We've seen several studies that have shown communities of color, women, rural communities, and the critical ways in which those identities intersect, will be disproportionately impacted by increased automation and digitalization in the workforce. It's not to say that we're going to see a slew of robots march in to take over folks' jobs in a matter of days; but the train is leaving the station and it is inevitably rolling to a place in which people will increasingly need to possess an ability to work alongside technology. And unfortunately, there are certain communities who won't define that transition as an easy one because they have not yet had the opportunity to gain familiarity with or perfect those digital skills necessary to hold not just a job, but a good job, and dare I say even a good career in this economy.

People wonder: what role does the FCC have in the future of work? And I say, the better question is what role doesn't the FCC have in the future of work? Fifth Generation wireless technology (5G) is going to shape our collective future - and we need to think as hard about people as we do about pole attachments. Much like the 5G Fast Plan, we need to develop a 5G Work Plan. 5G as a disruptor is also part of the force that will deliver opportunity. In particular, I note that the top 10 projected regions for net job growth for the African American community from 2017-2030 all have or will soon have 5G: Houston; Dallas; Atlanta; Orlando; Charlotte; Fort Worth; Raleigh; Miami; Brooklyn and Los Angeles.

Further, when we're talking about the future of work, we're talking about digital skills, and it would be misguided for us to not couple that

discussion with the importance of broadband access and broadband adoption. It's no secret that we have a broadband infrastructure issue in this country and that is largely impacting our most rural communities. However, we also have a broadband adoption problem in this country, which is impacting communities all across this nation, including our most urban centers. Census Bureau surveys show that three times as many households in urban areas remain unconnected as in rural areas.

And this matters because we can't expect people to have the ability to work remotely, start or sustain their own business, or upskill and reskill themselves using online training programs, if their barrier to adopting broadband is affordability. We need to help people across this country keep pace with this changing world, rather than turning our backs on them. As much as people around here like to think it's the folks inside of the Beltway who keep America running, I would beg to differ. The backbone of this country is made up of the farmer in Bakersville, Virginia, the grocer in the Piggly Wiggly in Batesville, Mississippi, the machinist in Detroit, Michigan and the administrative assistant at the medical clinic in Brooklyn, New York.

Which brings us to today. The future of our economy is dependent on how we treat our most vulnerable communities including those most susceptible to job displacement or disruption. The time is now to bring together a cross-section of stakeholders—academics, local community and civic organizations, non-profits and corporations to understand the risks to high rates of job displacement and build a strategy to prepare for the future. Each of you brings a unique role, insight and perspective on this multi-layered issue. Many of you know that I am still basking in the Super Bowl victory of my hometown Kansas City Chiefs, and in that theme, let's move the ball down the field today. Through this roundtable discussion today, our participants will not only conceptualize the problems we face at the intersection of broadband access and the future of work, they will also share what's working and what we can do on all levels to ensure that the benefits of a technologically advanced society flow to all members. Let's get started.

Thank you all again for joining me here today and I look forward to engaging with everyone on the future of work.