

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI**

Re: *Mitigation of Orbital Debris in the New Space Age*, IB Docket No. 18-313.

Shortly after becoming FCC Chairman, I had the opportunity to meet Newton Minow, who was Chairman of the FCC during the Kennedy Administration. To me, the most interesting part of our conversation was his description of how the FCC helped spur the beginning of the U.S. commercial space industry. Chairman Minow famously believed that putting satellites into space was more important than putting a human being there. As he put it, “Communications satellites are more important than sending a man into space because they will launch ideas, and ideas will last longer than men and women.”

Today, our nation’s commercial space sector is growing rapidly. And at the FCC, we have been working hard to help our industry seize the opportunities of the new space age. Because satellites have become smaller and we now have more agile, reusable launch vehicles, we can send large numbers of satellites into low- or mid-Earth orbit. These non-geostationary satellite orbit, or NGSO, constellations could be a game changer, benefiting Americans across the country and making high-speed Internet access a reality for more consumers—particularly those in remote and hard-to-serve areas. That’s why, under my leadership, the Commission has approved 14 applications and market access requests by 11 companies for NGSO systems. Our action in this area fits well with the FCC’s twin goals of closing the digital divide and promoting innovation.

However, more satellites in space means a lot more traffic, especially in low-earth orbit. As we enter a new era in which tens of thousands of new satellites could be deployed, space debris is becoming a more serious concern. If you want a graphic illustration of the problem, just re-watch the movie *Gravity*. In space, even a centimeter-wide object, traveling at tens of thousands of miles per hour, can do massive damage to both manned and unmanned spacecraft. Moreover, parts can break off from rockets and satellites during a launch and remain in orbit for decades. And a collision between two satellites could have a catastrophic impact on the space environment for centuries to come.

So as the FCC facilitates the deployment of new satellite constellations, we also must address the problem of orbital debris. And address it we have. Today, for the first time in 15 years, we are adopting new rules to mitigate the threat posed by orbital debris, including regulations involving satellite design, better disposal procedures, and active collision avoidance. 15 years is an eternity in this fast-moving sector, and the time has come to address this critical issue. The rules that we adopt today take a balanced approach: mitigating the risk posed by orbital debris, while at the same time continuing to light a regulatory path for space-based innovation.

Some of my colleagues asked that we move our consideration of certain issues from the Report and Order to the Further Notice so that we could seek additional comment on them, and I was happy to accommodate that request. But let me make clear that I plan on bringing these issues to closure once we have received additional feedback. Because while our action today is an important step toward addressing the threat posed by orbital debris, there is still more that needs to be done to protect the space environment. It is in everyone’s interest keep the final frontier safe for new and innovative uses. So I look forward to continuing to work with the private sector and other government agencies to implement common-sense solutions to get the job done.

I’d like to conclude by recognizing the staff of the International Bureau for their ongoing efforts to mitigate space debris. Thanks to your efforts, the American people will benefit from the rules adopted in this item. In particular, I’d like to express my gratitude to Jose Albuquerque, Jennifer Gilson, Samuel Karty, Karl Kensinger, Robert Nelson, Sankar Persaud, Tom Sullivan, Troy Tanner, and Merissa Velez.

I'd also thank those from other Bureaus and Offices who have played a critical role in advancing this item: Peter Alexander, Mark Bykowsky, Patrick DeGraba, Jerry Duvall, Virginia Metallo, Marilyn Simon, and Emily Talaga from the Office of Economics and Analytics; Martin Doczkat, Michael Ha, Nicholas Oros, and Anthony Serafini from the Office of Engineering and Technology; Deborah Broderson, David Horowitz, and Bill Richardson from the Office of the General Counsel; and Thomas Derenge, Paul Moon, and Roger Noel from the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau.