

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER BRENDAN CARR**

Re: *Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Phase I Auction Scheduled for October 29, 2020; Notice and Filing Requirements for Auction 904*, AU Docket No. 20-34; WC Docket Nos. 19-126, 10-90.

Morris, Minnesota is a small town of about 5,000 people. It sits on the far western edge of the state and in the middle of some of the richest agriculture land in the country. When I was there, I visited with two of the largest job creators in that rural community.

One is a dairy farm that Brad and Krista help run. It started as a family farm 80 years ago, and today its employees own a large share of the operation and its thousand-strong herd of cattle. They told me that a new high-speed Internet connection is now key to their operation. All of the cows have e-tags on their ears, which monitor vital signs and movement. And the employees use smartphone apps and a Wi-Fi connection to fine tune everything from feeding regimes to the health of the herd.

Later that day, I toured a manufacturing plant that employs about 800 people. The company's skilled workforce produces steel conveyors and storage tanks for the energy industry. As their CEO Micah walked me around the plant floor, he said that the business and its hundreds of good-paying jobs simply would not be in Morris without their high-speed Internet connection.

So when we talk about closing the digital divide, we need to keep in mind the broader economic benefits and jobs that high-speed Internet connections bring to small towns like Morris. We want every community in this country to have the opportunity that fast Internet connections enable. And our Universal Service Program is a key part of the solution in communities like this—communities where low population densities and high build out costs erode the private sector business case.

We've made significant strides over the last few years in narrowing the digital divide. And there is certainly much more work to do. Today's vote represents the next step in the FCC's most significant effort yet towards connecting the hardest-to-serve parts of the country. This auction will allow providers to bring millions of Americans across the digital divide.

Nonetheless, there are some that are urging the FCC to slow down and wait. There is no need for this delay. The FCC's broadband maps, for all their flaws, are accurate for the Phase I purposes we rely on today. And we have already established Phase II of the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund to address with greater granularity those parts of the country where the maps overstate coverage. So I am pleased that we keep moving forward today and let a range of different providers and technologies compete in the auction.

Thank you to the staff of the Rural Broadband Auctions Task Force, the Office of Economics and Analytics, and the Wireline Competition Bureau for their hard work on this item. It has my support.