

**REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**  
**FORUM ON 5G OPEN RADIO ACCESS NETWORKS**  
**WASHINGTON, DC**  
**SEPTEMBER 14, 2020**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for organizing this important discussion. As many of those gathered here today may recall, the United States was once a worldwide leader in telecom network hardware. Companies like Lucent and Motorola led the world in the design and manufacture of telecom equipment, from the radio antennas to the core. Unfortunately, however, American leadership in this market disappeared over time. While many factors were at work, American telecom carriers were eventually left without a reasonable domestic option.

The timing could not have been worse, as the Chinese government's "Made in China 2025" strategy decisively tilted the playing field in favor of its own telecom equipment manufacturers. Chinese government support artificially lowered Huawei and ZTE's prices, assisted in their research and product development, and undercut international competition. This was not free-market competition, but part of a strategy to leverage economic power into geopolitical dominance. Through this unfair advantage, the equipment produced by these companies has become pervasive around the world, and even reaches US networks.

This isn't just economic gamesmanship. According to our intelligence agencies, in exchange for this subsidization, Chinese corporations have siphoned data, allowed backdoor access to state agencies, and enabled functionality for network disruption. As a result, the technological foundation of our communications networks has been weaponized.

Congress and the Commission have recognized the problem of untrustworthy equipment in US networks and are working to ensure its removal and replacement. Open RAN networks may be part of the solution. Almost exactly a year ago today, I published an op ed advocating for the development and use of software-enabled, virtualized 5G infrastructure to replace suspect equipment. Our country has long been a technology leader in software and wireless technology – growing our capability to make secure infrastructure makes sense from both a security and an economic standpoint.

We need to invest in this technology. And we must do some deep and proactive thinking on the best policies to effectuate our goals of promoting secure telecommunications networks that benefit our shared future and get the best value for the American tax-payer where we need to "rip" and "replace" insecure, Chinese equipment. So here's a new idea. I recommend that we explore that each "rip and replace" carrier rebuilding its network be required to consider solutions offered by an O-RAN provider. That would achieve many of our goals, including encouraging global competition with Huawei, capitalizing on U.S. software advantages, accelerating the development of O-RAN as a product-model and a business-case, and allowing for alternative vendors to enter the market and offer specific network solutions. While no carrier should be forced to adopt, it would encourage carriers to consider a technology that might have been overlooked otherwise.

O-RAN holds tremendous promise. Its growth could advance American technological leadership, enhance competition, and reduce our reliance on foreign vendors—all while bringing down replacement costs. It deserves serious consideration and I look forward to this conversation.