

**Remarks of FCC Commissioner Michael O’Rielly
Before the Commission’s “Forum on 5G Open Radio Access Networks”
September 14, 2020**

Good Afternoon. Many thanks to Chairman Pai for establishing this forum and for inviting me to provide a few comments ahead of the next exciting panel of experts. This has been a fascinating discussion so far, and I have no doubt that this upcoming group will provide further insight into this important technological innovation.

When the pandemic disrupted the original plan for this forum and the suggestion was made to convert it to an online event, I enthusiastically welcomed the move. Nowadays, there are few — if any — Commission functions that *must* be done in person. I hope future Commissions readily embrace this reality and cut back on forcing people to travel to the new Headquarters for each of these opportunities. As a technology-centric agency, it is imperative that the FCC reside on the leading edge of technology. Technology adoption starts at home, and maximizing our own use of advanced communications will lead to more sound policy outcomes.

Turning to the topic at hand, there should be little doubt about the importance of wireless technologies and devices in today’s society, both for consumers and businesses. Almost every American uses or interacts with wireless services, in one form or another, in their daily lives. The question becomes whether these wireless communications — especially those prevalent in the envisioned future of 5G licensed services — are sufficiently protected from certain nation states, rogue organizations, troubled individuals, or a combination thereof, each of which may be intending to engage in nefarious or harmful activities against Americans and the rest of the world.

The advent of Open RAN provides one path to potentially minimizing exposure points. In its simplest conceptual terms, Open RAN can be considered analogous to secure interoperability. By breaking wireless networks into components and moving away from end-to-end product lines, overall security can actually be improved. Whether it is reducing reliance on foreign manufacturing or providing incentives to harden physical infrastructure and protect corresponding software from intrusions, Open RAN can reduce threats to overall network security, if done properly, and give users the necessary confidence to transmit even the most sensitive data at any time and from any location.

Let me lay down three conditions that I believe are essential to ensure the success of Open RAN. First, it must be done without any technological mandates imposed by the US government, or any other government or intergovernmental body for that matter. The FCC and certainly other government entities lack the capabilities and requisite knowledge to impose specific network design requirements or other such directives on the private sector. This point has been proven time and time again, but it bears repeating here. Second, we must maintain vendor neutrality. That means no single company or select set of companies should be blessed or favored by the government over others that provide the same functionality. We must not pick winners and losers, especially since doing so can stymie the advancement of ideas and innovation. Third, and related to the first two, the process must remain voluntary. Certain companies may have nuanced views of how to develop and implement the new technology, and they should be permitted to proceed as they see fit. The market will sift the best ideas and ultimately determine which approaches work best.

With that said, I want to extend my thanks to all the expert panels and express my appreciation for being part of what is truly the best panel of the day. Over the next seventy minutes, panelists will

explore various ideas and discuss the current state of the marketplace and what is being done in the field. The discussion will likely examine the practical experiences and case studies of equipment manufacturers and software providers in the development and advancement of Open RAN. What is being done today? What have been the most significant successes and failures? What are the major obstacles going forward and what does this mean for the future of an Open RAN?

I thank everyone for their attention and turn the floor back over to Chairman Pai.