

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
AT THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE
TOWER PROVIDERS AND INFRASTRUCTURE ASSOCIATION**

SEPTEMBER 21, 2020

Good evening! Thank you to Chairman Gupta, Director General Dua, and everybody at TAIPA for inviting me to be with you tonight.

I'm jealous that I'm not in India with you to celebrate in person. And I'm not just saying that because your workday has just ended while mine is just beginning. To get into the celebratory mood, I may have slipped a little Feni in my coffee this morning.

I'm honored to be the Chief Guest for tonight's celebration. I'm sure this honor is a lot more fun when you are not on BlueJeans and 10 time zones away. But I'm grateful and humbled, nonetheless.

One positive of having many events move online during the pandemic is that it has made it a lot easier for me to participate in events that are hosted overseas—in particular, events in India like this one. In these forums, I have often opened my remarks by reliving some of the highlights of my February visit to India as a part of the U.S. government delegation. I've talked about meeting with counterparts in the Indian government and conversations with Prime Minister Modi. And I never forget to mention I got to attend the state banquet at Rashtrapati Bhavan, sitting across the table from A.R. Rahman. I just did it again.

But on the occasion of TAIPA's 10th anniversary, another visit to India is front of mind for me.

In October 2018, I had the opportunity to attend the India Mobile Congress. During this trip, I visited a dusty neighborhood outside New Delhi, where I saw a cell site from TAIPA member American Tower. This cell site provides wireless coverage to thousands of people for whom a mobile phone is their only digital access to the outside world. And the fiber that feeds the site is used for Internet kiosks for teaching math and reading to kids in impoverished areas. As a person of South Asian descent, I can't describe what it meant to see Indian kids eager for the opportunity to learn and improve their lives.

To me, this site visit perfectly captures why this anniversary is worth celebrating. Because, at the end of the day, TAIPA is dedicated to much more than erecting towers and building out infrastructure. You are about expanding opportunity. You are about promoting economic growth and prosperity in places that have too often been left behind. You are about hope for the future.

You've had quite a run over the past 10 years. Your members have done the hard work to deploy infrastructure and bring Internet connectivity to all corners of the country. And having climbed a 131-foot tower once with some line workers in Colorado, I have a special appreciation for the risks your workers take building and maintaining networks.

As an organization, TAIPA has been a thought leader working with national, state, and local officials to promote best-in-class digital infrastructure. In this capacity, you have provided valuable support to ambitious government programs like Digital India and Smart Cities.

But for all the progress that's been made, you understand that there is still so much more to achieve for the communication infrastructure sector in India. Why else would you be rolling out a new white paper at your 10th anniversary celebration? You've already got your eye on 5G and other new technologies being introduced right now and in the near future.

Additionally, the pandemic has also brought lot more urgency to efforts to connect all of our citizens. If you don't have Internet access during a pandemic, you can't work from home, your child can't access online education, you can't see a doctor remotely, and—obviously of lesser importance, but

true nonetheless—you can't watch Akshay squirm as his mother presses him to find a suitable spouse on the Netflix show "Indian Matchmaking."

In the United States, we are grappling with this issue, too.

When it comes to 5G, we all understand that infrastructure will be essential. That's because 5G requires much more densified networks. For example, the United States will need to install hundreds of thousands of small cells—an exponential increase in the number of antenna locations for our current networks.

At the FCC, we've taken many actions to streamline our rules and make it easier for the infrastructure industry to build, maintain, and expand America's wireless networks.

To make it easier to install wireless infrastructure like small cells, we set a reasonable deadline for cities to rule on siting applications. We also set reasonable limits on siting fees—limits that still allow localities to cover their costs.

We also clarified the Commission's rules for when wireless infrastructure companies want to upgrade the equipment on existing structures, such as replacing antennas on a macro tower or adding antennas to a building. These clarifications will accelerate the build out of 5G infrastructure by avoiding misunderstandings and reducing the number of disputes between local governments and wireless infrastructure builders—disputes that lead to delays and lawsuits.

We also convened a panel of outside experts from industry, state and local government, and the non-profit community. We call it our Broadband Deployment Advisory Council. A key focus of the Committee was easing access to utility poles, and one of its recommendations was what became our "one-touch make-ready" reform—making it much quicker and cheaper to enable new attachments to poles.

Here's the context. In the United States, many poles already have electric utility, telephone, and cable lines attached to them. Instead of having multiple parties sequentially prepare poles for a new attacher, as was the practice, the process can be much quicker if a single construction crew does all the make-ready work at once. Hence the "one-touch-make-ready" policy. It is now much easier for broadband providers to attach fiber to utility poles. This not only speeds up network buildout, it also opens the door to new entrants who can increase broadband competition. And by promoting fiber network buildout, we're supporting the expansion of wireless intermediate networks, too.

Some local governments challenged our "one-touch-make-ready" rules in court, but just last month, a federal court rejected these appeals and affirmed the Commission's policy.

We've also modernized rules to make it easier for carriers to transition from maintaining yesterday's copper networks to building tomorrow's fiber networks. And we scrapped utility-style broadband regulation inspired by rules from the 1930s.

These reforms have helped to spur record-breaking capital investments in infrastructure essential for 5G, including fiber-optic cables and small cells. For example, in the four years before I became FCC Chairman, the number of cell sites in the United States increased by fewer than 7,000. But in my three years in this role, the United States has gained over 87,000 cell sites, with over 46,000 added last year alone.

In the United States, we not only want to promote the deployment of cutting-edge networks, we also want to make sure that they are available to all. We recognize that there will always be sparsely populated, difficult-to-serve areas where there's no good business case for private companies to deploy networks. For those areas, the FCC has started public-private partnerships in which we subsidize broadband providers to connect places where the economics don't work. Our newest—and biggest—initiative to close the digital divide in our hardest-to-serve communities is our upcoming, \$20.4 billion Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. This initiative will connect millions of unserved homes and businesses

through a two-phase reverse auction that encourages deployment of the best-performing networks for the lowest cost possible.

Obviously, connecting the unconnected is a huge challenge for India with its vast population in remote areas. But I also see this as a huge opportunity for TAIPA and its members. We should all agree that everyone, no matter where he or she lives, should have access to the opportunities of the digital age, whether in a big city like Jaipur or a rural village in Jharkhand. You can help make that a reality for often-overlooked rural communities on the wrong side of the digital divide.

I know that my peers in the Indian government share this commitment to the widespread deployment of next-generation broadband infrastructure. You just heard from my good friend, Chairman Sharma, whom I met on my very first international trip as FCC Chairman. We charted a plan for enhanced collaboration and signed a Letter of Intent for cooperation between the two agencies. Since then, our two agencies have increased our cooperation, regularly exchanging information and sharing ideas on topics of mutual interest. Promoting massive investment to expand broadband connectivity has been a constant focus of this partnership.

On the surface, towers and infrastructure may not sound exciting. But the reality is that the digital revolution is not just about inventors tinkering in their garage or dorm room. It's about work crews climbing towers to install antennas and build the networks of tomorrow.

Thank you to TAIPA for all that you have done to build this digital future. Happy 10th anniversary! Here's wishing you a wonderful celebration and continued success in the years ahead.