

**REMARKS OF FCC CHIEF OF STAFF MATTHEW BERRY
AT THE 9th ANNUAL AMERICAS SPECTRUM MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE
PANEL ON “COVID-19—WHAT IMPACT AND LESSONS FOR THE SPECTRUM
COMMUNITY?”**

OCTOBER 12, 2020

Good morning. Thank you, Johanne. It’s great to be with all of you, and I look forward to a lively discussion with my fellow panelists Miguel, Scott, and Tom.

Earlier this morning, Chairman Pai kicked off this conference with a summary of the Commission’s efforts to promote United States leadership in 5G. He noted how all of our major initiatives over the past two years had been laid out in his 2018 remarks at this very conference. But while we knew long ago that we would be spending the past few years repurposing spectrum for commercial use and removing barriers to infrastructure deployment, I did not foresee that we would spend most of 2020 dealing with a once-in-a-century pandemic.

I’m proud of all of the FCC’s efforts to keep Americans connected during this difficult time. But this morning, given the topic of the panel, I’d like to focus on our work on the spectrum front. When the pandemic hit, we understood that increased demand would be placed on our nation’s broadband networks as Americans engaged in social distancing. And with respect to wireless broadband in particular, we quickly recognized that one of our most effective tools for meeting increased consumer demand would be giving providers temporary access to additional spectrum.

So on March 15, just two days after the President declared the COVID-19 outbreak to be a national emergency, we granted our first Special Temporary Authority—or STA—to respond to the crisis, allowing T-Mobile to use additional spectrum in the 600 MHz Band.

And that was just the beginning. Our strategy was to grant access to additional spectrum wherever possible and wherever it could make a difference.

So, for example, since that first STA grant on March 15, we approved an additional 23 STAs in the 600 MHz band.

We granted STAs to AT&T, U.S. Cellular, and Verizon to use AWS-3 spectrum to expand the capacity of their networks.

We also granted AT&T temporary authority to use spectrum licensed to DISH in the AWS-4 band for the purpose of boosting network coverage in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

We allowed dozens of fixed wireless Internet service providers to use the lower 45 megahertz of spectrum in the 5.9 GHz band. These WISPs deliver Internet access to some of the hardest-to-connect rural communities in our country, and these STAs have made a difference. To give just two examples, Skynet360 in Florida City, Florida, used a 5.9 GHz STA to extend network access to over 100 homes in a rural area of the Florida Everglades. And Amplex in Luckey, Ohio, reports that its 5.9 GHz STA helped increase bandwidth across its network by 50% and handle a greater than 30% increase in traffic due to the pandemic. Altogether, the Commission has approved 160 STAs in the 5.9 GHz band.

Speaking of the hardest-to-serve communities, we approved the temporary use of unassigned 2.5 GHz spectrum to provide wireless broadband service over the reservation of the Pueblo of Zuni in New Mexico. We granted 2.5 GHz STAs to the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, Santa Clara Pueblo, Lower Brule Sioux, Makah Tribe, and the Navajo Nation. And we also approved temporary access to 2.5

GHz spectrum to improve access to wireless broadband services in low-income, rural communities in Harlan County, Kentucky.

Of course, our efforts haven't been limited to providing additional spectrum for use in remote areas. For example, we granted New York City an STA to expand the capacity and coverage of its Fire Department's communications system using T-Band spectrum. This increased bandwidth helped to support emergency medical dispatch operations during the coronavirus pandemic.

We also approved 21 STAs for backhaul communications services in the 6 GHz, 11 GHz, 18 GHz, and 70/80/90 GHz bands.

Add them all up, and the Commission has so far approved over 230 COVID-19 related STAs. That averages out to more than one-a-day since our first on March 15.

What has been the result? During the pandemic, we've been very pleased by the performance of our nation's wireless networks. For example, according to Ookla, notwithstanding increased demand, in April average mobile broadband download speeds in the United States were actually faster than they were in February, before the pandemic hit, and they've gotten faster since.

I believe that much of this success is due to the policies that we put in place well before the pandemic, market-based policies that encouraged investment in broadband networks and made it easier to deploy infrastructure. But making more spectrum available during the pandemic has also made a positive impact. For example, we've seen evidence that our 600 MHz STAs helped T-Mobile double the speed of its 4G LTE service in certain parts of the country.

The last thing I want to say before I wrap up is that all this work was done on top of the Commission's regular workload. Even with all our COVID-19 related activity, of which I only mentioned a fraction, the Commission was able to complete major proceedings like our order to make the entire 6 GHz band available for unlicensed use—all while working remotely, I would add. So if there's one lesson I've learned about how best to deal with a crisis like a pandemic, it's to hire and nurture a staff as great as the FCC's.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here. I look forward to the discussion.