

**REMARKS OF  
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS  
AT THE 9TH AMERICAS SPECTRUM MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE**

**OCTOBER 12, 2020**

Good morning. Thank you, Ruth, for that introduction and for inviting me to join this very important discussion on the future of wireless at a time when our country faces such profound challenges and opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp relief a host of problems that at their core are about fairness—issues of racial justice, economic security, and the digital divide, among others.

The past few months have underscored a basic truth: full participation in civil society requires an internet connection. Wireless technologies, including emerging 5G technologies, have an important role to play here. That’s why we must do more to make high-quality, affordable broadband, including 5G wireless service, available to everyone. In planning and promoting the deployment of advanced wireless networks, we have an opportunity to promote digital inclusion and combat longstanding inequalities. According to the Pew Research Center, a disproportionate number of Black and Latinx Americans rely solely on their mobile devices to connect to the internet. So 5G will be especially important for these wireless-only households—and a tremendous boost for all Americans.

We’re also on the precipice of important economic developments fueled by wireless. One of the most exciting aspects of 5G is its ability to support networks of sensors for use cases ranging from smart cities to manufacturing, to public safety, to connected cars and wearables. According to one study, over the next 10 years, the number of connected IoT devices will increase from 7.6 billion to 24.1 billion. Using wireless connections, these sensors will relay critical data that will allow us to strive towards environmental justice, increase industrial efficiency, identify potential hazards before they get out of control, and live healthier, more productive lives. Every community deserves these opportunities.

But we have work to do to make sure those benefits are fully realized. Building on U.S. leadership in software and wireless technology and growing our wireless infrastructure capabilities make sense from both a security and an economic standpoint. The U.S. 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. As we move toward next-generation networks, U.S. leadership will have profound implications for our economy and national security. That’s why securing our telecommunications equipment urgently deserves our attention.

Since I joined the Commission, I’ve been vocal about the need to secure our communications networks. My *Find It, Fix It, Fund It* initiative brought national attention to the urgent need to support small and rural companies as they work to make their networks more secure by addressing the problem of equipment from untrustworthy vendors in our wireless networks. Chinese-owned companies Huawei and ZTE pose big challenges to 5G network security. The Chinese government has 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 U.S. networks. According to our intelligence agencies, Chinese corporations have siphoned data, allowed backdoor access to state agencies, and enabled functionality for network disruption. These are significant threats to our national security.

I'm glad that the agency has taken steps to identify and remove that equipment, and that Congress has passed supportive legislation. But we have much more work to do. Neither the FCC nor Congress has detailed exactly how untrustworthy equipment will be removed and replaced. And Congress has not provided the funding that process requires. Small wireless carriers bought this equipment legally and in good faith. They have now recognized the dangers, and they need our help to address them. Funding delays are creating serious issues for some of these carriers, which face potentially significant expenses with no relief in sight. I am committed to working with Congress to ensure that sufficient funds are appropriated soon and that a remedy can be provided quickly and responsibly.

With the needed funding, I'm optimistic that we can make the needed replacements and end up with stronger, more secure networks—and I see Open RAN technology as a part of that solution. We need to invest in this technology to enhance our national security and improve our global competitiveness. Using standardized hardware and interoperable interfaces to make our networks more nimble and less vulnerable to the lack of supply chain diversity that has led, at least in part, to our current security predicament. It will also promote American innovation in the development and implementation of this technology. These are exciting possibilities.

The efforts I've described to promote American leadership and secure our networks must be a part of a well-coordinated, government-wide strategy around wireless. As this morning's panel will no doubt discuss, the United States have made a number of important strides in preparing for 5G success—from allocating hundreds of megahertz of spectrum to promoting research and development—even as departments have sometimes worked at cross-purposes with each other. I'm confident we can do more, and I look forward to working with you all on a coordinated strategy for making the many benefits we've discussed today available to everyone.