

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
AT THE FCC ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON DIVERSITY AND DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT
TECH SUPPLIER DIVERSITY OPPORTUNITY SHOWCASE**

OCTOBER 23, 2020

Hey, everybody! Thank you, Sanford, for that introduction and for your leadership. And thanks to everyone for joining us on a Friday afternoon. Normally, we wouldn't host an event on a Friday before the weekend. Then again, things are hardly normal. Are Fridays and weekends even a thing anymore?

The fact that things aren't normal is one of the reasons this event is so important. The pandemic is not only a once-in-a-century public health challenge. It's also a once-in-a-century economic challenge.

Businesses of all sizes have had to scramble to respond to COVID-19. But small businesses have disproportionately felt the pain of the pandemic. And minority-owned businesses have been hit particularly hard. According to one study back in August, black-owned businesses have shut down at more than double the rate of white-owned businesses.

Remember, minority- and women-owned businesses were underrepresented in the communications space before COVID-19. There's a reason the FCC hosted another supplier diversity workshop back in 2018. And the pandemic has only exacerbated pre-existing issues like disparities in businesses connections and access to capital.

The workshop was important in 2018. It's even more important now.

Today's showcase is bringing together venture capital groups, community development financial organizations, technology companies, and civil rights organizations to facilitate access to economic opportunities in the ICT sector for small and diverse businesses. We will also have a workshop to assess the impact of COVID-19 on small, diverse businesses and to evaluate CARES Act implementation and additional opportunities for financial support and relief.

The pandemic has not only made this forum more important, it has also made it more difficult to pull off an event like this. So, with your indulgence, I'd like to thank everyone who made it possible.

First, thank you to our three co-hosts: the FCC's Media Bureau; the Digital Empowerment and Inclusion Working Group of our Advisory Committee on Diversity and Digital Empowerment—or ACDDE; and the Internet Association, a member organization of the ACDDE.

Each of these co-hosts has been blessed with outstanding leaders, who helped make this event happen. In particular, I would like to recognize Michelle Carey, Sarah Whitesell, and Brendan Holland from our Media Bureau; Rudy Briocche, who chairs the working group; and Jon Berroya, Sean Perryman, and Kacie Hackett of the Internet Association.

Thank you to everyone on their respective teams. I truly appreciate how much work went into organizing this event.

Special thanks to the members of the Showcase Planning Committee, and to all of today's speakers, moderators, and panelists who have volunteered your time to be with us.

Obviously, this event is just one of many initiatives being advanced by our Diversity Advisory Committee. Thank you to ACDDE Chair Anna Gomez and Vice Chair Heather Gate for their continued leadership. Dr. Nicol Turner Lee, who will kick off today's second session, is doing a great job as the Chair of our Diversity in the Tech Sector Working Group. I'd like to add a special shout-out to S. Jenell Trigg and Susan Au Allen for their joint effort leading the committee's Digital Empowerment Subgroup.

I also want to commend Jamila-Bess Johnson, Julie Saulnier, and Jamile Kadre for their extraordinary efforts as the FCC's lead staffers for the committee.

And I can't recognize FCC staff who were critical to this event without also recognizing Sanford Williams and Celeste McCray from our Office of Communications Business Opportunities, Gerard Williams from our Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, and Jeff Riordan from the Office of Media Relations' A/V team.

When I announced, back in 2017, that we were going to be re-establishing our Diversity Advisory Committee after it had been disbanded years earlier, actions like today's showcase are what I had hoped for. And the Committee's leadership has delivered, time and again.

This August, the Digital Empowerment and Inclusion Working Group convened a virtual workshop to explore the role of libraries as anchor institutions and drivers of broadband adoption. This event examined best practices for public-private partnerships, particularly those that support the work of libraries to drive digital literacy and promote Internet use and adoption.

The Access to Capital Working Group is planning a full-day symposium for November 6, just a couple weeks from now. This event will include presentations and panel discussions on how new entrants, including minorities and women, can access financing for broadcast transactions; the current tax certificate legislation; Nielsen ratings for multi-ethnic broadcasters; and access to advertising by small and minority-owned broadcasters.

Our Diversity in the Tech Sector Working Group has convened roundtable conversations with leaders from diverse tech startup firms about the financial challenges they are facing due to COVID-19. Looking ahead, it's planning a tech training and employment summit, geared to high school and college students, scheduled for January 15 of next year. This event promises to deliver practical, actionable advice on topics like crafting a resume, interviewing skills, and building a network within the tech and telecom industries. It is also working on a follow-up report to the "2019 Tech Supplier Diversity Best Practices Report" on the status of women-owned, minority-owned, and small business suppliers in the telecommunications, media, and tech sectors. The new report will take a close look at the impact of the pandemic and the growing demand for 5G.

Here's the bottom line: the FCC's Diversity Advisory Committee is busier than ever. And it's more important than ever. This dedicated group of professionals—who volunteer their time and energy—has truly met the moment with their important work on diversity and inclusion. We appreciate your role in bringing important, underrepresented perspectives to our policies and decisions at the Commission.

Thank you again for all that you do. Have a great showcase. And then have a great weekend!