

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER BRENDAN CARR**

Re: *Restoring Internet Freedom*, WC Docket No. 17-108; *Bridging the Digital Divide for Low-Income Consumers*, WC Docket No. 17-287; *Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization*, WC Docket No. 11-42.

COVID-19 has altered the lives of so many Americans. Daily routines—like driving to work, sending the kids off to school, or even catching up with friends—were upended. As social distancing recommendations spread across the country, Americans recreated these routines online in an instant. In turn, Internet providers saw a sudden, 30 percent spike in traffic levels. That may not sound like a lot in the abstract, but that’s the equivalent of fast-forwarding about two years’ worth of traffic growth and putting it onto the network overnight.

In this sense, COVID-19 represented the ultimate stress test of America’s communications networks. And those networks performed when it mattered most. Our fixed networks showed strength and resiliency. Consumers experienced essentially zero degradation in service. And speeds on our mobile wireless networks actually increased during the pandemic.

More than just testing our physical networks, the sudden spike in Internet traffic served as the ultimate test of America’s approach to Internet regulation. While our networks delivered high quality service despite elevated traffic levels, countries that take a heavier or utility-style approach to regulating the Internet were not so fortunate. Their networks strained to maintain quality and speed. Across the Atlantic, EU officials asked Netflix and other streaming platforms to reduce their video quality to prevent the continent’s networks from breaking. Even with those measures, fixed download speeds in Europe were far slower than in the U.S. And in China, Internet speeds dropped 40 percent.

America’s communications networks performed because of the record-breaking levels of infrastructure investment we have seen over the past few years. While the U.S. has only 4 percent of the world’s population, it enjoys 25 percent of the broadband investment, and that is not an accident. Since the FCC’s 2017 *Restoring Internet Freedom Order*, providers have been deploying high-speed networks at a record pace. We’re seeing more miles of fiber and a greater number of high-speed cell sites getting built than ever before. Internet speeds in the U.S. have nearly doubled since our 2017 decision, and the digital divide narrowed by about 37 percent over the past few years. Competition has increased as well, with the percentage of Americans with more than two options for high-speed Internet service increasing by 52 percent, all while prices have been decreasing.

The bottom line: America’s communications networks were in far better shape to handle the surge in COVID-19 traffic than they were under the Commission’s Title II regime. More communities were connected to robust and resilient services; more Americans had a choice for their broadband needs. This should put the debate over utility-style regulation of the Internet in the rear-view mirror once and for all. And it should focus all of us on what really matters—continuing to close the digital divide and making sure every American has a fair shot at next-generation connectivity.

In the end, though, the fight over “net neutrality” at the FCC has never really been about net neutrality. That’s just the sheep’s clothing. It’s always been about rate regulation—a surefire way to kill innovation and scare off investment.

In closing, I want to express my thanks to the staff of the Wireline Competition Bureau for their work on this item. It has my support.