

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
AT INDIA MOBILE CONGRESS 2020**

DECEMBER 9, 2020

It's great to be back at the India Mobile Congress. I attended this event in New Delhi two years ago. Back then, I spoke about how every facet of our lives is moving online. This pandemic is *not* what I had in mind. Regardless, I appreciate any chance to be with this audience.

Thank you to the U.S.-India Business Council for helping to organize this roundtable. Thank you as well to COAI for your efforts in putting together this virtual India Mobile Congress, and I wish your organization continued success under the leadership of new Director General Kochhar.

While I regret that I couldn't be with you in person today, my disappointment is tempered by the fact that I was able to take a trip to India just days before the United States locked down for the pandemic. And it wasn't just any trip. In February, I was honored and humbled to be a part of the U.S. government delegation visiting India. From my bilateral visits with counterparts in the Indian government to conversations with Prime Minister Modi and the state banquet at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the energy and excitement were incredible. The visit left me with an even deeper appreciation of the common values our countries share, and I welcome this opportunity to further strengthen these ties.

Moving this event online is not the only notable change from the last time I attended India Mobile Congress. My longtime counterpart R.S. Sharma is no longer the head of TRAI. While I am sad to see him go, I am grateful for his friendship and partnership over the years.

I am honored to be joined on today's panel by his successor, P.D. Vaghela. Congratulations to Chairman Vaghela on his new appointment. Or do you still go by Dr. Vaghela? As the child of two Indian physicians, I know which title they would prefer.

We've been asked to talk today about finding the right balance when it comes to regulating the 5G marketplace. IMC's organizers have made no secret about their favored approach when they titled this session "Light Touch Regulation." Fortunately, I share this approach, so you'll hear no complaints from me.

So, what does this balanced, light-touch approach look like in the United States?

Over the past few years, the FCC has aggressively executed what we call our 5G FAST plan to promote the development and deployment of 5G technologies in the United States. This strategy has had three parts: freeing up spectrum for the private sector, promoting wireless infrastructure, and modernizing our regulations to encourage deployment of fiber, which is needed to carry wireless data into the core of the network.

On spectrum, we've been the most aggressive and successful FCC in history. With three high-band spectrum auctions, we've already made available more spectrum for commercial use than the total amount of spectrum previously used by all wireless service providers in the United States combined. We've already finished repurposing low-band spectrum in the 600 MHz band for mobile broadband, which is now being used to provide 5G service that reaches over 250 million Americans.

And we've made a lot of progress on mid-band spectrum, which is appealing for 5G because it combines good geographic coverage with good capacity.

In July 2019, for example, the Commission adopted flexible new rules for the 2.5 GHz band. This is the United States' single largest band of contiguous spectrum below 3 GHz, and it's well-suited for 5G deployment. We recently concluded a Tribal Priority Window to enable Native American Tribes

to get early access to 2.5 GHz spectrum in rural areas and intend to auction any remaining spectrum shortly after we finish processing applications filed during that window.

We also made bold changes to bring the 3.5 GHz band into commercial use. Thanks to those changes, this past August, the FCC successfully completed an auction of 70 megahertz of licensed spectrum in the 3.5 GHz band—our first-ever auction of mid-band spectrum for 5G. And we've completed the necessary technical work so that the band's entire 150 megahertz is now available for the private sector.

In August, the White House and the Defense Department announced that the 3.45-3.55 GHz band should be made available for 5G as quickly as possible. The FCC immediately followed up on that announcement in September, proposing to make this 100 megahertz of contiguous mid-band spectrum available for 5G, while accommodating the limited remaining operations of federal government incumbents. I'm optimistic that we will be able to auction the 3.45 GHz band next year.

The Commission's biggest auction of mid-band spectrum for 5G is actually kicking off this week. Yesterday, we started an auction as part of our reorganization of the 3.7 GHz to 4.2 GHz band—commonly called the C-band. This spectrum is now mostly used by fixed-satellite companies to beam content to video and audio distributors. With advances in technology, however, these companies can now provide the same services using alternative technologies and considerably less spectrum.

That's why, this past February, the FCC voted to clear the lower 300 megahertz of the C-band and make 280 megahertz of this spectrum (3.7-3.98 GHz) available for 5G through a public auction. All eligible space station operators currently using this spectrum have committed to a quicker relocation to the upper 200 megahertz of the C-band—meaning that the lower 280 megahertz will become available for 5G two to four years earlier than otherwise would have been the case. I am excited that the auction is starting this week.

Add all these efforts up, and we are on a path to have a contiguous 530-megahertz swath—from 3.45 to 3.98 GHz—of mid-band spectrum available for 5G. Not bad, especially considering that we had to start virtually from scratch when I came into office in 2017.

Now, as I mentioned, spectrum is just one of the three planks of our 5G FAST plan. We have also gotten major results on the other two: promoting wireless infrastructure and modernizing our regulations to encourage more fiber deployment, which is essential for wireless backhaul.

When it comes to 5G, we all understand that infrastructure will be essential. 5G's more densified networks will require that we install hundreds of thousands of small cells—an exponential increase in the number of antenna locations for our current networks. And we will need more fiber to connect to more cell sites and carry more data to the core of the network.

This is an area where the FCC has been working to find the “right balance” and apply a “light touch.” Due to bureaucratic delays, we had areas in the United States where it could take more than two years to get the regulatory approval for small-cell deployments, which can take just two hours to actually install. We'd also seen excessive and inconsistent siting fees imposed by local governments. Some cities charged \$5,000 for the same approval that might cost \$50 elsewhere.

At the FCC, we've done a lot to streamline our rules and make it easier to build, maintain, and expand America's wireless and wireline 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. Again, we tried to find the right balance.

To make it quicker and cheaper to enable new attachments to poles, we adopted our “one-touch make-ready” policy. Instead of having multiple parties prepare poles for a new attacher one after the other, as was previously the practice, a single construction crew now can do all the make-ready work at

once. This not only speeds up network buildout. It opens the door to new entrants who can increase broadband competition. And by promoting fiber network buildout, it supports the expansion of wireless intermediate networks, too.

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 ended 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. In 2018, and then again in 2019, the United States set records for annual fiber deployment. And the number of new cell sites in the United States has skyrocketed. In 2018 and 2019, we added over 72,000 new wireless cell sites in the United States, 10 times more than the deployments from 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016 combined.

On top of all these efforts to promote the development and deployment of ultra-fast, high-capacity 5G networks, the FCC is committed to making sure those networks are secure.

For years, U.S. government officials have expressed concern about the national security threats posed by certain foreign communications equipment providers. To counter this risk, the FCC has prohibited the use of money from our Universal Service Fund to purchase or obtain any equipment or services produced or provided by companies posing a national security threat, including the world's largest global 5G supplier—Huawei. We have seen telecommunications operators around the globe taking actions to make their networks secure. This audience is probably already familiar with Reliance Jio's actions on this front in India, but Telefonica in Spain, Orange in France, Telstra in Australia, SK and KT in South Korea, NTT in Japan, and telecom operators in Singapore, as well as many others, have made the decision to only use trusted vendors in their 5G deployments.

Fortunately, technological innovation has the potential to address some of these security concerns. Open Radio Access Networks, or Open RANs, could transform 5G network architecture, costs, and security. This fall, the FCC held a forum on open, interoperable, standards-based, and virtualized radio access networks. Several industry leaders, including Reliance Jio President Mathew Oommen, participated in the conversation. A consensus emerged from the forum that Open RAN technologies are already showing great promise in the United States and around the world, and that the public and private sectors should continue to encourage development and deployment of these systems, which can enable diversity in suppliers, improve network security, and lower costs.

When it comes to 5G, we cannot afford to make risky choices and just hope for the best. We must see clearly the threats to the security of our networks and act to address them. And the more that the nations represented at this conference can work together and make security decisions based on shared principles, the safer that our 5G networks will be.

This actually brings me to the last point I want to make today. It is in our mutual interest for the U.S. and India to work together not only on 5G security, but on issues across the communications landscape and beyond.

As the world's oldest and the world's largest democracies, the U.S. and India share many strategic interests, from promoting mutual economic prosperity to global security. Americans and Indians also share a broad set of core values: a desire for freedom borne of a struggle for independence; pluralism; community and family; entrepreneurship; and a strong work ethic.

By working together, we can build a brighter future for our countries and the world. In fact, one could argue that the partnership between the United States and India will be the defining one of the 21st century.

One area where this collaboration will be key is the communications sector. In terms of trade, investment, and job creation, the ICT sector is the largest area of bilateral engagement between our

countries. The U.S. and India will be central to the next wave of emerging technologies like 5G, AI, and quantum Internet. We will shape not only how these technologies evolve, but also how their benefits are shared. We need to lead the way in showing the world that the best way to unlock technological innovation and expand digital opportunity to our citizens is by harnessing the power of free and open markets. That's why it is imperative that our countries develop a strategic digital partnership.

I'm proud to say that, over the past four years, the FCC has made tremendous progress building and nurturing this partnership.

In February 2017, I joined with Chairman Sharma in Barcelona to sign a Letter of Intent between our two agencies and our governments. This agreement established a cooperative framework for exchanging ideas on topics of shared interest, such as accelerating broadband deployment and spectrum policy. Over the past several years, our agencies have effectively undertaken more than twenty engagements in support of the LOI, including ten bilateral meetings, six videoconferences, and five replies to requests for information. Through these exchanges on a wide range of policy and regulatory issues, we are building a deeper understanding of each other's views and ideally a foundation for future consensus.

I welcome continued cooperation with TRAI under the able leadership of Chairman Vaghela. We at the FCC look forward to collaborating with you and your team to further advance the positive implementation of our LOI.

In addition to the regulator-to-regulator relationship, the FCC also stands ready to advance shared goals by supporting wider interagency engagements between the U.S. and Indian governments.

In October, for example, we joined the U.S. delegation to the U.S.-India ICT Working Group. Many broader digital economy topics are under discussion in the working group, such as data protection, privacy, and cross-border data flows, which fall under the purview of other participating expert agencies. And I particularly appreciate that the working group included not only a government-to-government session, but also an industry-led session. In order for us as regulators to facilitate an environment that allows industry-led investment and innovation to thrive, it is critical for us to understand the perspective of U.S. and Indian industry leaders. To that end, I look forward to the insights from the participants in the roundtable today.

Speaking of endings, it's time for me to wrap this up. And by "this" I'm not just talking about my remarks. Moments ago, I acknowledged the recent departure of Chairman Sharma. As you've probably heard, I announced last week that I will be leaving the FCC on January 20, 2021. Serving as the FCC Chairman has been the greatest professional honor of my life. It has given me the opportunity to travel across the country and around the world, meeting new people and forming new relationships, as well as strengthening existing ones. None are more meaningful to me than my engagements with the people of India, the land of my ancestry. It has been a particular privilege to serve as the first Indian-American in this position, representing the strong bond between our countries. I will forever be grateful for your friendship, your hospitality during my visits, and your willingness to work together to promote digital opportunity in each of our countries.

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