

COMMISSIONER SIMINGTON ADDRESSES THE NTCA—THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY CONFERENCE

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to speak to you in person today. You represent some of the most vital players in our country's broadband deployment efforts. While there are challenges to getting high-speed internet in all kinds of communities, it's rural consumers who rely most heavily on government subsidies and the providers who take them, especially in the most sparse, remote, and geographically challenging areas.

So, the first thing I want to communicate today is appreciation for your engagement with the FCC and your diligence in implementing the programs we have come up with over the years. Your representatives are a crucial resource for commissioners and commission staff who are tasked with crafting and implementing the programs that make it possible for you to serve more customers in more areas with better service than ever before. And this partnership has been a successful one. The phenomenal quality of American internet service—among the best in the world—is enjoyed by Americans in towns small and large.

But as you know, the work is not done. There are still many people in this country who don't have affordable access to the kinds of speeds that we think are desirable for full participation in modern life. A couple of years ago, we might have expected that additional urgency on this front might have merely translated to expansion and further refinement of the FCC's high-cost programs. But instead, Congress has decided to take a different direction, allocating over \$40 billion dollars to a grant program to be administered by the NTIA and implemented by each state.

Getting this new program right will require intense cooperation between the FCC, NTIA, and the fifty some jurisdictions that will be receiving the grants. The NTIA will rely on FCC maps to allocate funds, so those maps need to be correct, and when inevitable mistakes are made, they need to be corrected promptly. And the NTIA and states will need to work closely with the FCC to avoid duplicative efforts, overbuilding, and other inefficiencies. For their part, the FCC's existing high-cost programs might end up looking very different in a world flush with NTIA's grant money. But in the meantime, you rely on them as you carry out your deployment commitments and continue to serve your existing customers.

It's clear that more than ever, we need your input. So, I'm happy to sit down with your CEO Shirley Bloomfield and share some of my thoughts and concerns, and hopefully put all of you in a position to better communicate with my office and the FCC about how we can address these challenges and make the next decade even better for broadband deployment than the last two have been.