

**REMARKS OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS
AT THE MULTICULTURAL MEDIA, TELECOM & INTERNET COUNCIL'S
2022 FORMER FCC CHAIRS SYMPOSIUM
JULY 20, 2022**

Good morning, and thank you MMTC for hosting this event.

So many of us in this room have dedicated our careers to improving broadband quality and access. I wanted to touch briefly on why I still feel the fierce urgency of now.

The pandemic has, to be sure, accelerated the digital transformation. It has shifted markets toward telemedicine, remote work, online learning and skills training, and toward small businesses that are able to embrace a digital presence. From where I stand, that's real progress. But what strikes me, and what concerns me, is how low-income Americans and communities of color, in particular, remain disproportionately disconnected. To speak plainly, this is a fundamental issue of equity.

What does that mean for broadband policy? It means the time value of broadband adoption has grown extraordinarily high. The longer we wait, the further behind we leave the unconnected—more so than ever, a connection delayed is an opportunity lost.

And not just for today. Connectivity, of course, is also about the promise of a better tomorrow. Better healthcare outcomes, higher educational attainment, and good jobs. To share in these benefits in the future, though, people need connectivity starting now. By 2030, more than 70 percent of all American jobs, and 90 percent of high-paying jobs, are expected to require advanced digital skills. These are skills you can't build overnight, and that are much harder to acquire without a home broadband connection.

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Let me talk for a moment, on how we get there. I have focused my time and leadership efforts on the issue of affordability. We have a gamechanger with the Affordable Connectivity Program—though we must keep pushing to seize its full potential.

ACP finally provides the framework, and the funding, to unleash free, high-quality internet to millions of vulnerable Americans nationwide. Of 48 million households eligible for ACP, we have 12.8 million signed up, and we need to continue to raise awareness, develop trust, and execute on enrollment. That's why I'm thrilled to see an order on our August agenda that would establish a new ACP pilot program guided by these principles. Called *Your Home, Your Internet*, I'm leading this program to help families receiving federal public housing assistance in twenty cities get connected by making the ACP application easier to complete, developing better intergovernmental coordination, using clearer language, and providing more opportunities for assistance during the sign-up process.

I look forward to working with this group as we continue the effort to get more families in low-income housing connected.

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I wanted to close by touching on another urgent matter that will define our shared future—the environment—and the important role that I see the telecommunications and technology sector playing. Right now, every sector is focused on doing more while using less, and we should as well.

We can start by supporting and scaling up efficiency-driven wireless use cases. These technologies can help us avoid carbon emissions at an extraordinary scale, while also making businesses more competitive, and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law presents a perfect opportunity to accelerate their development. With smart planning, we can jumpstart smart infrastructure, smart grids, and smart cities, as we prepare our roads, bridges, power systems, and more for a 21st century economy.

Of course, we can't stop there. Given the narrow window we have to act, industry needs to take a harder look at its carbon commitments. We also need to find ways to squeeze efficiency from the network and limit e-waste. At the same time, we need to prepare ourselves to meet new and predictable challenges—like managing the emissions embodied in the billions of new wireless devices expected to deploy in the coming decade.

Here's the point: we have long spoken about the economic benefits of 5G. We must also put in time, thought, and attention into maximizing the environmental benefits of 5G, and other advanced connectivity technologies.

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Thank you, again, MMTC, for bringing us here today – and thank you, everyone, for your collective work in bringing broadband to everybody.