

COMMISSIONER SIMINGTON ADDRESSES THE COMPETITIVE CARRIERS ASSOCIATION

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Hello, it's very good to be with you all virtually today. Thank you for inviting me to speak to you about the importance of 5G and bridging the digital divide.

5G, and the technologies it can enable, are not promised to us. As those in rural America well know, 5G is not an inevitability, or simply a function of time and technological development. It is the product of purposeful effort and long-term planning. The capital-intensive 5G transition has been a decade in the making and we are poised to fully deploy 5G in C-Band spectrum, with the auction of the 3.45 GHz band in sight. But much work remains.

In order to ensure the continued success of 5G and that we indeed see robust deployment of 5G services to those who most need it, policy makers must get spectrum policy right; and do so right now. We've all noticed that there has already been a mental shift among in some policy circles, from one where the highest and best use of spectrum is one of high-power, exclusive use licensing, to one of a shared spectrum model. I have said myself that I think the need for sharing of spectrum will only increase over the next 20 years. And people looking ahead to 6G often assume that a sharing model will predominate.

However, before we make the leap to a sharing-centric model in policy, we should remember that being too early can be even worse than being too late. It doesn't do us any good if we have the New Coke of spectrum policy. The United States is a huge market—but it's not the whole world, and we can't afford to be an island in a sea of exclusive-use, full-power licenses. It doesn't matter who I ask; device manufacturers, tower equipment companies, network engineers, major telecoms, everyone agrees that for 5G, we need the present licensing model.

Apart from its benefits to consumers, I think we all expect the 5G revolution to create new application frameworks and new industrial possibilities. And this is where 5G can really bridge the digital divide—5G-enabled smart factories. 5G factories can revive the once vibrant industrial sectors of many smaller and rural communities and the technology can enable a factory to be much more flexible by connecting everything through a wireless private network. And let's not forget 5G's high reliability and ultra-low latency (think exclusive-use licensing), which could allow a factory to more easily produce one product in the morning and another in the afternoon. Employing 5G wireless technology in a factory can allow for no downtime because of rewiring, with much higher productivity for manufacturers and more safety for workers.

And, based on where we are right now, the networks needed for 5G manufacturing to take off must be funded by companies whose present customer base emphasizes the consumer sector. If consumers see benefits from 5G, the money will be available for the networks we need to support a new generation of manufacturing applications—just as we're starting to see in countries where 5G has a head start.

It is also important to recognize that most of the companies developing for 5G are global, so I encourage and hope that Congress distinguishes this trend and the need for global harmonization as it considers FCC spectrum pipeline legislation. As for the long-term, whether it be allocation of the 7-15 GHz bands for 6G, more millimeter-wave bands for high throughput applications, or dedication of low-band spectrum for short-range applications like wireless charging and vehicular radar, we must work closely with standards bodies, trade associations, international regulators, and of course, industry, to make the right bands available for future technologies. And, in doing this, we at the FCC must continue its great work to improve our processes with federal users and other spectrum-focused federal agencies, so that Congressional intent in establishing a pipeline will cash out into timely and copious spectrum availability.

Thank you all. Enjoy the rest of the conference.