Remarks of FCC Commissioner Olivia Trusty

"More Than Code: The Networks Behind the AI Moment"

State of the Net

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Good afternoon. Thank you to the Internet Education Foundation for convening this extraordinary group of leaders from across policy, industry, and civil society. Year after year, State of the Net creates space for conversations about what comes next. And today, what comes next is unmistakably artificial intelligence.

AI is no longer a future concept or a pilot project. It is here. It is deployed. And it is already reshaping how our communications networks operate, how people connect, and how services are delivered. The real question before us is not whether AI will transform communications, but whether our networks, our spectrum policies, and our regulatory frameworks are ready to support it at scale.

AI's promise ultimately depends on the strengths of the systems that move data: spectrum, infrastructure, and connectivity. Without strong networks, even the smartest technology falls short. That reality places communications policy squarely at the center of the AI conversation. AI algorithms may be written in code, but they live and operate on networks. Without fast, reliable, and resilient communications systems, AI cannot deliver on its potential.

The United States leads the world in computing power. That leadership reflects decades of innovation, investment, and a willingness to take risks. But computing power alone does not deliver impact. AI is powered by cloud computing, but it is delivered by networks and when networks are strong, the benefits of AI are already clear.

For starters, AI is making our networks smarter. AI-driven spectrum management and radio access network optimization are increasing capacity, improving efficiency, and enhancing performance, often without requiring additional bandwidth. These tools allow networks to anticipate congestion, allocate resources dynamically, and adapt in real time. All of this is key to supporting near insatiable demands for spectrum. Streaming, gaming, telehealth, and AI-driven

applications are all competing for capacity. Smarter networks mean more data, fewer disruptions, and better service, using the same underlying resources more effectively.

AI is also expanding the availability of critical resources in ways that directly affect people's lives. In rural communities, AI-enabled tools are helping health care providers reduce administrative burdens, stretch limited staff capacity, and improve patient care. Connectivity in these communities is not just a technology issue. It is a health care issue, a workforce issue, and a public safety issue. When AI tools are paired with reliable broadband, they allow rural providers to serve more patients, reduce costs, and deliver care that would otherwise be unavailable. But none of this works without strong networks underneath.

Enhanced accessibility is another benefit of AI. Real-time captions, speech-to-text services, and other assistive technologies are improving communications for Americans with disabilities. These innovations expand participation and opportunity, and they underscore a simple truth that connectivity is ultimately about people.

Importantly, AI's reach is global. AI powered services now reach billions of users across languages, borders, and cultures. Scale matters. And policy choices matter, too. Countries that enable innovation while maintaining trust will shape the global digital ecosystem for decades to come. The benefits of AI, although potentially limitless, extend only as far as our networks allow them to reach.

And none of this happens without spectrum and infrastructure. Demand for spectrum is not slowing. We know it is accelerating. AI-driven applications are data-intensive, latency sensitive, and increasingly always on. While AI can help us use spectrum more efficiently, efficiency is not automatic. It requires deliberate, forward looking policy.

That is where the FCC's responsibility is clear. Our job is to ensure that spectrum policy keeps pace with innovation, and in doing so, to make more spectrum available for innovators and developers, modernize how its managed, and support technologies that maximize its use. Spectrum remains one of the most critical enablers of the AI era.

The same is true for communications infrastructure. High-speed, high-capacity networks are not optional. They are foundational. Without them, AI's benefits remain concentrated rather

than broadly shared. Policies that accelerate deployment, reduce barriers, and encourage investment are essential, not just for connectivity but for competitiveness.

The United States is the global leader in AI today, but our competitors are not far behind. U.S. leadership exists because of innovators in this room, because of an ecosystem that rewards experimentation, and because of policies that have historically favored growth over constraint. But leadership is not guaranteed. It must be maintained through innovation, investment, and clear national direction. Executive actions, like the President's AI Executive Order, provide critical guidance and will ensure coordination across agencies, signaling that America will support responsible, scalable AI development while maintaining global competitiveness and dominance across many domains.

We should keep in mind that other countries are aggressively investing in AI, in spectrum, in infrastructure, and in talent. They are making strategic decisions designed to position themselves for long-term advantage. Maintaining leadership requires focus. It requires resisting fragmentation. And it requires recognizing that innovation thrives where policy provides clarity rather than confusion. Leadership in AI is not something you declare, it is something you earn, and something you must continuously defend.

The FCC does not build AI systems. We do not design algorithms. And we should not attempt to pick winners. But we do play a vital role in creating the conditions for innovation. When it comes to AI and the communications networks that support this technology, I believe that role should be guided by four principles.

First, the FCC should continue to focus on regulatory predictability and certainty, which are necessary to give communications providers and innovators the confidence to invest, build, and scale. Predictable regulation reduces uncertainty, lowers compliance costs, and allows resources to flow toward broadband access and innovation rather than regulatory navigation. Fragmented and inconsistent frameworks, particularly across jurisdictions, slow progress and discourage risk-taking. Today, one of the greatest risks to continued American leadership in AI is fragmentation. In just the last year, nearly 1,200 AI-related bills were introduced across the United States at the state level alone. While well-intentioned, this growing patchwork of approaches creates uncertainty, increases compliance costs, and risks slowing deployment, especially for smaller innovators who lack the resources to navigate fifty different rulebooks.

Innovation does not stop at a state's borders, and our policy frameworks should reflect that reality.

Second, the FCC should continue to put infrastructure first by prioritizing policies that accelerate the deployment of high-speed, high-capacity networks nationwide. Initiatives like the FCC's Build America Agenda demonstrate how policy can lay the foundation for innovation, expand coverage, and ensure that all Americans can access these technologies. These networks are non-negotiable for AI success. Policies that expand coverage, improve performance, and encourage investment are foundational, not just for connectivity, but to America's competitiveness in the AI era.

Third, the FCC should continue to pursue proportional and flexible approaches to regulation that recognize the pace at which AI technologies evolve. Prescriptive regulation does not work for fast-moving technologies. Smart policy is targeted, risk-based, and adaptable, allowing innovation to advance while addressing real and demonstrated risks. Good policy does not try to outpace innovation, it creates the space for innovation to run.

Fourth, the FCC must remain anchored in the public interest. As AI becomes more deeply integrated in communications networks, the Commission's role is to ensure that these technologies ultimately serve people, not just systems. That means promoting access, protecting consumers, advancing public safety, and ensuring that the benefits of AI-enabled networks are broadly shared. Innovation and the public interest are not competing values. The FCC's responsibility is to make sure they move forward together.

And no discussion of AI would be complete without addressing security. As AI increases the power and reach of our communications networks, it also changes the threat landscape, giving bad actors new tools even as it gives defenders better ones. That reality is already shaping the Commission's work. Over the past year, the FCC has taken concrete steps to strengthen network security and protect consumers as communications threats grow more automated, and more sophisticated. In 2025, the Commission enforced its robocall mitigation rules by removing more than a thousand noncompliant providers from the Robocall Mitigation Database, closing off network access that AI-enabled scam operations increasingly depend upon. The FCC also adopted updated rules for interconnected VoIP providers, extending public safety and national security certification requirements and tightening oversight of access to U.S. numbering

resources. At the same time, the Commission continues to examine how AI itself can be responsibly leveraged to enhance continuous network monitoring, fraud detection, and resilience. These efforts reflect a core principle that security and innovation are not in tension. When policy is targeted and proportionate, AI can help make our networks not only more capable, but more trustworthy.

We have faced moments like this before. In the early days of the internet, policymakers were confronted with a technology that was evolving faster than anyone could fully predict. There were real questions about market power, consumer protection, security, and fairness. There was also enormous uncertainty about how the technology would ultimately be used. What mattered most was how policy responded. Where policy focused on enabling infrastructure, encouraging investment, and preserving flexibility, innovation flourished. Light-touch approaches to internet architecture allowed networks to accelerate deployment rapidly. Entrepreneurs were able to experiment, new business models emerged, and consumers benefited from faster speeds, lower costs, and an explosion of services that few could have imagined at the time.

But there were also moments when policy moved too quickly, or too rigidly. In some cases, prescriptive rules were adopted before the technology had fully matured. In others, regulatory uncertainty created hesitation and slowed deployment. The result was a clear lesson: timing, scope, and regulatory humility matter. The policies that succeeded were those that recognized the limits of foresight, resisted the urge to lock in assumptions too early, and left room for technology to evolve. The policies that struggled were often those that tried to solve tomorrow's problems with yesterday's frameworks.

AI is at a similar inflection point. Like the early internet, AI is powerful, fast-moving, and not fully understood. Also, like the early internet, AI raises legitimate questions about trust, security and access. And, again, like the early internet, AI depends on strong, scalable networks to deliver its benefits. The lesson from history is not that government should step aside, but that it should act with precision, restraint, and an appreciation for how innovation happens. We should apply those lessons now, while the trajectory of AI is still being shaped, not after it has already hardened into place. The biggest mistake we can make with AI is assuming we already know exactly how it will evolve.

The bottom line is that AI makes everyone a stakeholder. Developers, network operators, policymakers, and consumers all have a role to play. The FCC's role is to clear the path to ensure that networks are strong, spectrum is available, infrastructure is deployed, and policy supports innovation rather than standing in its way.

If we get the fundamentals right, innovation follows and opportunity expands. That is how leadership is sustained. That is the work ahead of us, and its work worth doing together. Thank you.