

Remarks of FCC Commissioner Olivia Trusty
National Urban League Empowerment Summit
March 18, 2026

Good morning, everyone.

It is an honor to join you at this year's National Urban League Empowerment Summit. The National Urban League has long been at the forefront of efforts to enhance economic mobility, advance civil rights, and ensure equality of opportunity for all Americans. I am grateful to be with leaders who are focused on not only overcoming today's economic and societal challenges, but on preparing for tomorrow's possibilities in the Age of Artificial Intelligence.

Long ago in the early 2000s, I was a student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. While there, I had the privilege of competing on the University's gymnastics team. In gymnastics, we competed under what's called the "Code of Points", the rulebook that defines how routines are scored and how difficulty is evaluated. Over time that Code changes. And when it does, athletes must adapt. Skills that were once cutting-edge become baseline. Combinations that once impressed judges no longer earn top scores.

To stay competitive, I had to learn new skills, more difficult tumbling passes, more complex combinations, and sometimes routines that felt risky and uncomfortable at first. This required retraining, a commitment to continuous learning, and an understanding that transformation was required to be competitive at the collegiate level.

Today, in the Age of Artificial Intelligence, our workforce is facing a similar moment.

AI represents an updated Code of Points, as intelligent technologies are reshaping the job market and the skills needed for workers to succeed. Although this new technology frontier promises vast economic and national security benefits, a part of realizing those gains depends on empowering workers, across communities, across industries, and across generations, to thrive in an AI-driven era.

Under President Trump's leadership, he has taken decisive action to position the United States to achieve global dominance in AI. A key part of the President's AI Action Plan is the adoption of a "worker-first AI agenda," an agenda that prepares the Nation's workers to effectively navigate this AI revolution.

For government, this means expanding AI literacy and skills development at every level, from K-12 exposure to workforce retraining, and apprenticeship programs. It also means building public-private partnerships that connect education, industry, and community organizations. And, it means ensuring that access to opportunity is not limited by zip code.

At the Federal Communications Commission, our role is foundational. AI cannot function without connectivity. And, Americans cannot benefit from AI without access to connectivity. For the workforce in particular, access to high-speed broadband ultimately means access to education, to training, to entrepreneurship, to innovation, and to the opportunity to participate in the AI economy. The FCC is actively working to implement an agenda that expands the availability, affordability, and quality of these critical information services.

Our work at the Commission also includes engaging with industry partners to support workforce development initiatives that prepare Americans for careers in advanced communications and emerging technologies to maintain reliable, resilient, and secure AI infrastructure both now and in the future.

But government action alone is not enough.

For workers, preparation begins by taking the initiative to develop AI literacy skills. This means investing time to understand how AI tools work, where they can add value, and how to use them responsibly. It also means strengthening the uniquely human skills that AI cannot easily replicate: critical thinking, creativity, emotional intelligence, ethical judgment, and leadership.

Just as important is early, hands-on experience. Exposure to real-world applications builds confidence and competence. Whether through internships, apprenticeships, or on-the-job training, experience accelerates learning and opens doors.

Now, there will undoubtedly be disruptions. History tells us that every major technological shift brings change, and sometimes displacement. But history also tells us something else: innovation creates more opportunity than it eliminates when we prepare wisely.

In many cases, AI will not replace workers; it will augment them. It will elevate productivity and efficiency, enhance decision-making, and unlock new industries. We are already seeing AI being used as a tool to empower workers to produce more economic value, and it is giving rise to

the birth of new occupations, including “new collar” jobs that prioritize skills and certifications over traditional degree pathways. These roles offer real opportunity for economic mobility.

To meet this moment, it is imperative that we embrace continuous learning. Skills cannot remain static in a dynamic economy. Just like in gymnastics, if the Code of Points changes, you train again. You evolve. You refine your routine.

Coordination is also necessary across the public and private sectors, across educational institutions and employers, and national and community leaders. The work of empowerment has always required collaboration.

And of course, increasing broadband access to underserved and hard-to-reach communities remains paramount. Universal connectivity is what will fuel the Nation’s innovation capacity and ensure the development of an AI ecosystem that is open to all Americans. Through our agency programs and regulatory authorities, the FCC is committed to closing the digital divide so that everyone can access AI-powered opportunities through high-speed connectivity.

The mission of the National Urban League has always been about ensuring that opportunity reaches every community. In the Age of AI, that mission is more important than ever.

The Code of Points for the Nation’s workforce has changed. Now is the time to train, to learn, and to compete, not just to keep up, but to lead.

Thank you again for the invitation to be here and best wishes for a successful Empowerment Summit. I look forward to working with the National Urban League on these important initiatives in the months and years ahead.