Remarks of FCC Commissioner Olivia Trusty

"Commanding the Skies: Drone Dominance in the Age of AI"

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Good morning and thank you for that kind introduction. It is a pleasure to be here with all of you at the SCSP AI+ Expo.

I want to start with a scene: imagine a rural hospital in eastern North Carolina, two hours from the nearest trauma center, in a county where roads flood almost every hurricane season. A patient arrives at the hospital in crisis and needs O-negative blood immediately. Within seconds, a drone launches from a regional depot and delivers pints of blood to that rural hospital – all within eleven minutes. The patient survives. Without that drone, the only other option was a helicopter, which would have taken forty-five minutes, cost ten times as much, and, perhaps, led to a different outcome.

That scenario is hypothetical. But the technology that makes it possible is not. Today, variations of drone solutions are being tested and deployed across the country and around the world. And these new applications of unmanned aircraft systems provide the clearest answer I know to the question of why drone policy is so important in this age of artificial intelligence.

Throughout history, breakthrough technologies have reshaped how people live, work, and communicate. Steam power transformed industry and manufacturing. Electricity redefined daily life and enabled the development of modern economies. And the internet connected the world and launched an era of rapid and continuous innovation. Each of these technological advancements fundamentally altered the structure of our economy and way of life.

In retrospect, those transitions provide lessons for our approach to today's breakthroughs in unmanned aircraft systems and artificial intelligence. In every case, the country that wrote the rules, built the standards, the supply chains, and the infrastructure, captured the majority of the long-term economic and strategic benefits. Britain wrote the rules of steam. The United States wrote the rules of the internet. The question before us today is who will write the rules of a connected and intelligent airspace for drones and other aerial systems.

In what President Trump has called the Golden Age of America, the pace of innovation is accelerating beyond the ground and into the aerial domain. Thanks to private and public sector investments, connectivity is expanding upward into the skies as well, enabling the development of cutting-edge systems and applications. At the center of these advancements is the convergence of two powerful technologies: drones and artificial intelligence.

Drones, when powered by AI, are becoming a new and intelligent layer of our digital economy. We are already seeing early examples of this transformation. Drones deliver life-saving medical supplies in hard-to-reach areas. They help first responders assess damage after natural disasters in real time. They inspect bridges, power lines, and pipelines more safely and efficiently than traditional methods allow.

Drones are also revolutionizing agriculture, helping farmers to monitor crops, optimize inputs, and increase yields. In logistics, drones are redefining delivery systems by transporting goods to areas that were previously too difficult to reach quickly. And, of course, drones are transforming national security. This audience understands better than most, that on the battlefield, these systems are extending human capability, while compressing time, reducing risk, and multiplying operational scale. They are maximizing our lethality and reshaping the strategic landscape across warfighting domains.

These examples, however, represent only the beginning. In the years ahead, AI-enabled drones will invigorate our economy, further strengthen our national security, and redefine what is possible. The true power of drones lies not only in what they do, but also in how broadly they apply across our economy and society. And, increasingly, that power is driven by artificial intelligence.

Artificial intelligence is what is amplifying the benefits of these autonomous aerial systems. AI empowers drones to support comprehensive data collection activities and analyze that data on the fly – literally. This capability transforms raw information into immediate and actionable insights, improving existing processes, while creating entirely new and more efficient ones.

Drones equipped with AI are also able to identify risks, prioritize responses, and support decision-making when seconds matter. An AI-enabled drone can distinguish between a heat signature that is a survivor and one that is a fire remnant. It can flag a structurally compromised

building before a rescue team enters. And, it can triage across a disaster zone faster than any human team could manage. Together, drones and artificial intelligence allow first responders, warfighters, and civilians to act more quickly, more safely, and with better information.

The breadth and versatility of applications enabled by intelligent unmanned aircraft systems position them to transform multiple sectors simultaneously. They will drive productivity, reshape industries, and strengthen our global technological leadership. But realizing this tremendous promise depends on the policy choices we make today on both drones and AI respectively.

Starting with drones, U.S. leadership will require accelerating the safe commercialization of these systems, reducing reliance on foreign adversary supply chains, and strengthening the Nation's domestic manufacturing capabilities. Expanding testing environments and moving from pilot programs to widespread deployment are also key to building a resilient, scalable drone ecosystem that can be deployed safely and effectively across commercial and defense applications.

At the same time, cementing America's global leadership in drone production and deployment comes with a corresponding responsibility to lead in counter UAS technologies and processes. In this regard, policymakers must remain clear-eyed about the risks associated with unauthorized intelligent unmanned aircraft systems as they can pose serious threats to critical infrastructure: power grids, water systems, and transportation networks. They can be used for illicit or malicious surveillance in ways that implicate privacy rights and civil liberties. And, in combat scenarios, adversaries can use drones as asymmetric warfighting tools to exploit gaps in military defenses.

The challenge before us is how to move forward efficiently and responsibly. And, I am confident that because of strong leadership at the highest levels of our government, we will move forward with urgency, while striking the appropriate balance between innovation and security.

Through Executive Orders, President Trump has outlined a clear vision for American drone dominance. These actions have provided critical momentum for innovation, expanded testing, and operational deployment. They have also highlighted the need to balance rapid progress with the management of potential risks to our critical infrastructure. By setting ambitious national priorities, these policies have created a foundation upon which we can build sustained U.S.

leadership in unmanned aircraft systems, electric Vertical Takeoff and Landing aircraft, and more.

Consistent with the President's vision, at the Federal Communications Commission, we are focused on advancing policy initiatives that support the production, deployment, and dominance of U.S. drone capabilities.

Among those initiatives includes the FCC's work to enhance security and trust within the communications ecosystem. Through tools such as the Covered List, the FCC is working to prevent insecure or untrusted equipment from being incorporated into critical infrastructure. Last year, the FCC expanded that approach to drones, adding foreign-manufactured unmanned aircraft systems and critical components to the Covered List based on national security determinations. At its core, this effort is about ensuring that the United States' drone market is secure, trusted, and that principles of market fairness will determine who designs, builds, and deploys the intelligent systems that will define the future of our economic and national security.

At the Commission, we're also making more spectrum available. Reliable and interference-free spectrum is essential for safe and scalable commercial and defense drone operations. As drones become more autonomous, they also become more data-intensive. They rely on continuous, real-time communications to function effectively, transmitting sensor data, receiving navigation commands, coordinating with air traffic management systems, and in swarm operations, communicating with one another.

Without reliable access to spectrum, drones cannot communicate effectively, operate beyond visual line of sight, or scale from isolated use cases to widespread deployment. If spectrum is the oxygen of wireless innovation, then AI-enabled drones will depend on it at an unprecedented scale.

Increased coordination and collaboration with federal partners is also vital to our work. Effective integration of drones into our airspace requires alignment across multiple agencies and stakeholders on spectrum policy, risk mitigation, and more. Getting all Federal stakeholders aligned around a shared vision for intelligent airspace and doing so at the speed that the technology demands, requires sustained leadership. And, as artificial intelligence-driven systems become more complex and interconnected, this coordination becomes even more essential.

Leadership in this domain requires a whole-of-government approach, and the FCC is a key partner in that effort.

Other areas of FCC focus include improving the Innovation Zone program to accommodate testbeds for aerial operations, increasing the efficiency of device certification processes, and exploring the creation of a central UAS/counter-UAS resource. Such a resource could aid commercial drone operators and public safety entities to access information, links, and Commission contacts on the FCC's national security and UAS regulations.

Now, like drone policy, the choices we make today on artificial intelligence must be equally strategic and bold. U.S. leadership in AI is essential to American drone dominance. It will directly shape how effective, scalable, and adaptable intelligent unmanned aircraft systems can become. AI is vital to supporting autonomy at scale, speed of decision-making, and resilience in contested environments.

With the global AI race now firmly underway, the winner or the nation that secures a competitive edge, will be the one that prioritizes the deployment of strong communications networks – a key enabler of the AI stack and what allows AI models to be continuously improving systems. Strong networks and the strengths of systems that move data – spectrum, infrastructure, and connectivity – place communications policy squarely at the center of AI and, by extension, U.S. superiority in drone technologies.

Under the FCC's Build America Agenda, we are focused on advancing policies that accelerate the deployment of high-speed, high-capacity networks. Networks that not only expand coverage to the unserved, but are foundational to AI innovation, and moving large data sets from data centers to the edge. Our work here includes streamlining permitting processes that are obstacles to broadband buildout, replacing aging copper lines with fiber and IP-based networks to support higher data throughput, and boosting the space economy to add more connectivity, redundancy, and resiliency to the communications ecosystem. All of which is essential to AI leadership.

Like drones, AI also requires more spectrum. Making spectrum available for next-generation networks, like 6G, will help remove bottlenecks that currently limit where and how AI can be used. By integrating AI directly into the network itself, 6G will be able to automatically optimize network performance, predict congestion, and adapt in real time. These networks will also enable

capabilities like integrated sensing and communications, which will produce richer real-time data streams, more efficient learning and inference functionality, and faster decisions with lower latency. In sum, our ability to deploy and lead the world in next-generation networks is inextricable from our ability to lead globally in AI, and the physical and digital systems powered by this technology.

At the Commission we also remain committed to enhancing network security – another critical component to AI innovation. AI systems depend heavily on moving data between devices, servers, and users. If the network connection is not secure, the entire system becomes vulnerable and potentially dangerous. With that in mind, the FCC has advanced policies to strengthen the integrity of our equipment authorization process, increase transparency regarding the scope of foreign ownership and control in entities that hold FCC licenses and authorizations, and modernize our licensing processes for undersea cables to further protect our national security interests.

It is also worth noting that our work on network security inherently extends beyond our borders. And so, the Commission has prioritized international cooperation with foreign partners and allies to adopt shared principles related to trusted networks and digital services. The importance of other countries deploying open, interoperable, reliable, and secure communications networks and other underlying AI infrastructure cannot be overstated. As doing so will create secondary effects for the adoption of U.S. AI models at scale, growing U.S. leadership and technology superiority in the process.

Across all of these initiatives and more, our objective has been the same: ensuring that U.S. communications networks are built on trusted foundations to promote our economic and national security, and dominance in new technology frontiers.

This brings me back to where I began. We are at an inflection point for drones and AI. Drones are no longer a niche technology. When combined with artificial intelligence, they are fast becoming foundational to our economy, our infrastructure, and our national security. The decisions we make today will determine whether the United States leads or follows in these intelligent systems. If the United States hesitates, other nations will set global standards, build dominant supply chains, and shape the future of open, democratic societies. But, if we embrace

experimentation, regulatory humility and adopt pro-investment frameworks, the U.S. will be positioned to lead this next technological revolution and advance human flourishing.

And so, the path forward is clear. In this Golden Age, leadership requires vision, coordination, and decisive action. For everyone in this room and beyond, researchers, policymakers, operators, and investors, the ask is straightforward: build American, test faster, share data across agency lines, and treat the connected and intelligent airspace as the strategic domain it has already become.

Thank you.