

**Keynote
FCC Commissioner Olivia Britt Trusty**

**Innovation, Competition, and Regulatory Flexibility:
The U.S. Perspective on Transforming Digital Markets**

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Muy buenas tardes. Es un honor estar con ustedes aquí en Cartagena. Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be with you in Cartagena. Thank you to the Communications Regulation Commission of Colombia for hosting this year's International Regulatory Workshop. I am delighted to join so many regulators, industry leaders, academics, and distinguished guests from around the world.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge the devastating earthquake that struck western Colombia just three weeks ago. Centered near San José del Palmar in Chocó, this 7.4 magnitude earthquake has claimed hundreds of lives, injured thousands more, and affected communities across this country.

On behalf of the United States and the Federal Communications Commission, I extend my deepest condolences to the families who lost loved ones and to all those whose lives have been affected by this tragedy.

I also want to recognize the extraordinary efforts of Colombia's first responders and public officials, as well as communications providers and countless citizens who have contributed to the rescue operations in affected communities. And I commend the Colombian government and the Communications Regulation Commission, under the leadership of Executive Director Felipe Augusto Díaz Suaza, for their efforts to support the ongoing response and recovery.

Tragedies like this remind us that communications networks are lifelines. They connect families, first responders, hospitals, government agencies, and entire communities when reliable, accurate information is needed most, and when receiving that information in time can literally save lives.

That essential role of communications – connecting people, communities and nations – is also deeply woven into the history of the city where we gather today. Since becoming the central postal hub for Spanish maritime mail during the colonial era, Cartagena has long understood the importance of connection. And, why? Because the ability to connect is key to the functioning of any successful economy that allows information, goods, services, and financial transactions to move quickly and efficiently.

That same spirit of connection is being carried forward in today's digital markets, only now it is happening through different infrastructure. Infrastructure that is modern, intelligent, and highly interconnected.

In the 21st Century, thriving digital markets rely on fiber-optic cables that stretch across the ocean floor. Satellites orbiting thousands of miles above the Earth. Wireless networks that connect communities across mountains, jungles, and coastlines. And data that moves across borders in milliseconds.

Although the technology supporting the underlying infrastructure has changed, the fundamental purpose of connectivity has remained remarkably constant: to expand opportunity and improve societal welfare by bringing people, markets, and ideas closer together.

A brief look at history reminds us that every great communications breakthrough has done exactly that.

In August of 1858, after years of failed attempts, engineers accomplished something many believed was impossible. They successfully laid the first telegraph cable across the Atlantic Ocean. For the first time in history, a message could travel between North America and Europe in minutes rather than weeks. England's Queen Victoria exchanged messages with then-U.S. President James Buchanan, newspapers declared that distance had been conquered, and businesses immediately began imagining new possibilities for international commerce.

Ironically, the cable itself failed after only a few weeks. By most engineering standards, it was not an immediate success. Yet history remembers it as one of the most consequential infrastructure achievements of the nineteenth century, not because it worked perfectly the first

time, but because it proved that a new era of global communications was possible and could spur future advancements.

That vision for a new era of global communications ultimately unfolded within a generation, with modern submarine cables transforming international trade, diplomacy, finance, journalism, and communications. Indeed, entire industries have emerged because governments, engineers, and investors were willing to pursue an idea whose full potential no one could yet imagine.

That story has repeated itself throughout the history of communications. The telegraph gave way to the telephone. The telephone gave way to radio and television. Radio and television helped shape the technological and cultural foundations for the internet, which then transformed how information moves around the world. Mobile broadband placed extraordinary computing power into the hands of consumers. And today, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, satellite constellations, and advanced wireless networks and quantum technologies are beginning another communications revolution whose full implications we are only starting to understand.

The point is that each generation has inherited remarkable new communications technologies. And with that, each generation has inherited the responsibility to create public policies capable of supporting those technologies without constraining their potential. That responsibility belongs to all of us.

This afternoon, I will discuss four principles that have guided much of the United States' approach to communications policy and have helped to enable the vibrant and prosperous digital ecosystem we benefit from today. Those principles include the following:

- Principle 1: Successful digital markets depend upon sustained investment into resilient, adaptable, secure, and trusted communications infrastructure;
- Principle 2: Robust competition is essential to continuous innovation and consumer choice;
- Principle 3: Innovation flourishes when regulation remains flexible and can adapt alongside technological change; and
- Principle 4: International cooperation is strongest when it advances our shared interests while respecting each nation's sovereignty, laws, and institutions.

Digital Markets Begin with Digital Infrastructure

Principle 1: Successful digital markets depend upon sustained investment into resilient, adaptable, secure, and trusted communications infrastructure.

The story of the first transatlantic telegraph cable illustrates an enduring truth about communications policy: transformative technologies rarely emerge overnight. They are built upon decades of investment, engineering, and infrastructure that often receive far less attention than the innovations they ultimately enable. The same is true today.

When we talk about digital markets, it is easy to focus on the applications that have become part of our daily lives. Artificial intelligence. Streaming services. E-commerce. Digital banking. Telehealth. Online education. These innovations capture our attention because they are the services people see and use every day. But every major communications breakthrough to date has depended upon at least one common ingredient: someone was willing to invest in an uncertain future.

That is to say that none of these applications and services would exist without the investments into the enabling infrastructure beneath them.

Every artificial intelligence model depends on computing capacity, high-speed connectivity, and enormous volumes of data moving across communications networks. Every telehealth appointment depends on a stable broadband connection for a patient to communicate with his or her healthcare provider. Every online business depends on digital infrastructure capable of moving information quickly, safely, and efficiently. And every classroom located in a rural or remote area depends upon networks that students and teachers can access consistently and without disruption.

Each of these examples reminds us about the importance of the underlying infrastructure enabling these innovations. They also remind us that for these innovations to operate as intended and be embraced by consumers, the underlying infrastructure must possess these essential characteristics: resilience, adaptability, security, and trust.

Resilience to withstand natural disasters and protect communities from isolation during emergencies. Adaptability to continue providing communities with access to the most advanced applications, services, and technologies over time. Security to safeguard personal information

and reduce vulnerability to cyber-attacks or infrastructure vandalism. And trust to foster greater adoption and broader access to digital services. That all requires sustained investment.

The fact of the matter is that the strength of a country's digital infrastructure has a direct impact on the strength of its economy, public safety, and national security. Countries that invest in resilient, adaptable, secure, and trusted communications infrastructure are investing in future entrepreneurship, productivity, innovation, and economic growth.

When assessing opportunities to invest in and deploy communications infrastructure across this hemisphere, few would dispute that although it has some of the world's most dynamic cities, it has some of the most geographically challenging regions to connect as well. Mountain ranges, rainforests, deserts, islands, and rural communities all present unique obstacles for providers and policymakers. These geographic conditions mean that bringing high-speed communications to those communities requires more than technological innovation. It requires sustained investment. The role for policymakers is to help create the regulatory conditions that make these investments possible.

At the Federal Communications Commission, our work is focused on making additional spectrum available because spectrum is the essential resource that powers wireless innovation. We are also modernizing infrastructure deployment rules because reducing unnecessary costs and permitting delays accelerates investment into broadband expansion. We are streamlining satellite licensing, too, because next-generation space systems are now an integral part of the communications ecosystem, and modernized rules cut costs and clear the way for more innovation. And we are updating regulations that no longer reflect technological and marketplace realities because outdated rules can become unintended barriers to investment, and by extension, innovation and prosperity.

Although these issues can be technical and complex, their purpose is straightforward. Our objective is to create an environment in which innovators are able to build, invest, compete, and expand opportunity. And that starts with committing to sustained investments in communications infrastructure so that infrastructure can be the foundation for the next wave of economic and digital transformation.

Once that foundation is in place, another force begins to shape digital markets: Competition.

Competition Is Dynamic, Not Static

Principle 2: Robust competition is essential to continuous innovation and consumer choice.

Competition has long been one of the central objectives of communications policy because competition among communications providers has consistently led to the delivery of better services, greater consumer choice, stronger incentives to innovate, and lower prices over time. But competition among communications providers today looks very different from the models that shaped communications policy only a generation ago.

For much of the last century, competition was often measured within clearly defined boundaries. Regulators traditionally examined the number of providers, market concentration, pricing trends, and market share to understand whether consumers were benefiting. Those metrics remain valuable, but by themselves they no longer capture the full picture of how the market functions and how it has evolved.

Today, technology convergence is intensifying competition. Fiber competes with fixed wireless. Terrestrial broadband competes with satellite systems. Licensed spectrum exists alongside innovative unlicensed technologies. Cloud providers compete across national borders. And artificial intelligence is lowering barriers to entry by giving startups and entrepreneurs access to capabilities that once belonged only to the largest companies.

Innovation itself has become one of the most powerful competitive forces in the marketplace.

History demonstrates why this matters. Few people predicted that a mobile phone would eventually become a camera, a navigation system, a payment platform, a television, a workplace, and now an artificial intelligence assistant carried in the pockets of billions of people around the world.

Likewise, few expected satellite operators to become viable competitors in the broadband marketplace or wireless networks to become an indispensable tool for precision agriculture, advanced manufacturing, autonomous transportation, and industrial automation.

The lesson here is that technology repeatedly expands the boundaries of competition in ways that even experienced policymakers cannot fully anticipate, and that carries important implications for regulators.

Healthy competition should not be viewed as a fixed destination that can be measured at a single moment in time. It is a dynamic process driven by investment, technological progress, and the continual emergence of new ideas.

Markets that appear settled today may be transformed tomorrow by an innovation that did not exist when the rules were written. For that reason, effective communications policy should create conditions that encourage new entry, reward innovation, and lower unnecessary barriers to competition rather than attempting to preserve existing market structures indefinitely.

Consumers ultimately benefit when innovators are free to challenge established assumptions. In many cases, the most significant competitive pressure does not come from another company doing the same thing more efficiently. It comes from someone introducing an entirely different way of solving a problem.

That has been true throughout the history of communications. The internet transformed long-distance communications. Smartphones reshaped personal computing. And streaming fundamentally changed media distribution. Now, satellite broadband is expanding connectivity in places where traditional deployment remains difficult. And artificial intelligence is beginning to redefine how businesses operate, how governments deliver services, and how individuals interact with technology.

None of these developments fit neatly into yesterday's regulatory categories. Each demonstrates that competition is not simply about the number of participants in a market. It is about whether markets remain open to the next generation of innovators. Most importantly, the measure of successful competition is not whether today's market looks exactly as regulators expected. It is whether consumers have more choices, better services, greater opportunities, and increasing confidence that innovation will continue.

That understanding naturally leads to the next principle.

Regulation Must Evolve with Innovation

Principle 3: Innovation flourishes when regulation remains flexible and can adapt alongside technological change.

One of the defining challenges facing communications policymakers today is developing the right regulatory framework in response to changing market dynamics and technology

advancements. In a technology-driven economy, innovation is accelerating at an extraordinary pace, while regulatory frameworks are necessarily designed to provide stability and predictability over time. The tension between those two realities is unavoidable. But, I'd offer that the objective here is not to eliminate that tension, rather it is to manage it in a way that preserves both innovation and public confidence.

That means, building regulatory frameworks around enduring principles rather than specific technologies. Technology-specific rules often become outdated as innovation advances. Principle-based rules are far more likely to remain relevant through successive generations of technological change. That is why technology-neutral regulation has become a distinguishing feature of successful digital markets.

Good policy should define the outcomes society expects, protecting consumers, promoting competition, encouraging efficient use of spectrum, safeguarding public safety, and ensuring network resilience, without unnecessarily prescribing the technologies used to achieve those ends.

Equally important, governments should recognize the limits of their own role. Governments establish the framework. Entrepreneurs develop new ideas. Engineers solve technical challenges. Companies build networks. Researchers expand scientific understanding. Investors provide capital. And, consumers ultimately determine which innovations succeed. The bottom line is that healthy digital economies emerge when each of those participants is able to contribute its unique strengths.

When governments focus on outcomes rather than engineering solutions, innovators retain the flexibility to engage in permissionless innovation and discover approaches that regulators could never have anticipated. That flexibility has repeatedly produced remarkable results, including at the FCC where we have seen this principle demonstrated in a variety of ways.

Our rules for unlicensed spectrum, for example, created opportunities for entrepreneurs to develop technologies that eventually became Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, and countless other innovations now woven into everyday life around the world.

Opening the full 6 GHz band for unlicensed spectrum has been particularly valuable in delivering better performing Wi-Fi services to homes, businesses, and schools. This has helped

to reduce the cost of connectivity, increase productivity, and enable greater participation in the digital economy.

Enabling spectrum sharing in unlicensed bands has also led to advances in engineering that can make more efficient use of finite spectrum resources while continuing to protect authorized operations.

And access to experimental licensing has provided universities, researchers, startups, and established companies with opportunities to test new technologies before large-scale commercial deployment.

All of this to say that regulation should create pathways for innovation rather than barriers to it.

That does not mean regulation should be passive. Nor does it mean government should simply step aside. After all communications networks are essential infrastructure and consumers deserve confidence that the services they rely upon are safe, reliable, and secure.

The challenge for regulators is to address those issues in a way that preserves the flexibility necessary for continued innovation.

That requires something I believe is often undervalued in public policy: regulatory humility. Regulatory humility is not the absence of leadership. It is the recognition that policymakers should be confident in their principles while remaining humble about their ability to predict the future.

We recently put that principle into practice at the FCC by modernizing decades-old spectrum-sharing rules governing non-geostationary satellite systems. Rather than continuing to rely on legacy equivalent power flux density, or EPFD, limits, the Commission adopted a more flexible, performance-based framework designed to protect geostationary satellite systems while giving next-generation satellite operators greater freedom to innovate.

That flexibility has practical consequences. It can allow non-geostationary systems to operate more efficiently and make greater use of their technical capabilities to deliver high-speed broadband, including to remote and difficult-to-reach communities. And when terrestrial infrastructure is damaged by an earthquake, hurricane, or other natural disaster, satellite

networks can provide an important additional layer of resilience when communities need connectivity most.

That is regulatory humility in practice: protecting against harmful interference and preserving essential services, while recognizing that regulators do not need to dictate precisely how tomorrow's networks should be engineered.

It is yet another reminder of history, which has repeatedly demonstrated that transformative innovations often emerge from unexpected places.

Technological progress has a way of surprising even the most experienced experts. That is precisely why regulatory systems should leave room for experimentation. Some new ideas will succeed. Others will fail. Failure is an unavoidable part of innovation.

In practical terms, that means regulators should strive to provide certainty without creating rigidity. We should establish clear expectations while avoiding unnecessary constraints. We should protect consumers and critical infrastructure while preserving opportunities for entrepreneurs to challenge conventional thinking.

Good regulation should provide guardrails, not a roadmap.

It should establish the rules of the road while allowing innovators the freedom to determine where those roads ultimately lead.

As communications technologies become more sophisticated, and as artificial intelligence, quantum networking, integrated satellite-terrestrial systems, and eventually 6G reshape the communications landscape, that balance between certainty and flexibility will become even more important.

The institutions that succeed in the decades ahead will not be those that attempt to predict every technological breakthrough. They will be the ones capable of adapting as those breakthroughs occur.

International Cooperation in a Borderless Digital Economy

Principle 4: international cooperation is strongest when it advances our shared interests while respecting each nation's sovereignty, laws, and institutions.

The digital economy may be built on national infrastructure, but it operates on a global scale.

Communications networks cross borders. Satellites connect continents. Submarine cables link national economies. Digital services reach customers around the world in an instant. Cybersecurity threats rarely originate or remain within a single jurisdiction. Supply chains span multiple countries, and the research that drives technological progress is increasingly international.

In many respects, communications has become one of the most interconnected sectors of the global economy. That reality makes international cooperation more important than ever. Fortunately, cooperation is not a new concept in communications policy.

For more than a century, nations have worked together to coordinate spectrum, promote interoperability, support international standards, and expand global connectivity. Those efforts have enabled extraordinary technological progress while allowing countries with very different legal systems, economic priorities, and political traditions to work toward shared objectives.

That kind of cooperation is especially important in communications because networks do not stop at national borders. Greater spectrum harmonization can create economies of scale, reduce equipment costs, and accelerate the deployment of new technologies. Global interoperability allows networks, devices, and services to work together across borders. And reliance on trusted vendors and services strengthens the security and resilience of communications infrastructure. These are practical areas where international coordination can expand the benefits of innovation for everyone.

The same principle applies to satellite connectivity. As satellite systems extend service offerings to customers across regions and continents, we should encourage transparent and reciprocal approaches to market access. Indeed, countries benefit when their domestic operators have meaningful opportunities to compete in their markets. That does not require identical rules. But it does require transparent processes, fair treatment, and a shared commitment to competition so we don't undermine the very innovation global cooperation was meant to advance.

Now, it goes without saying that every country represented here faces different circumstances. Some are connecting densely populated urban centers. Others are focused on reaching remote rural communities, mountainous regions, islands, or vast stretches of sparsely populated territory. Some markets are mature. Others are growing rapidly. Some countries are prioritizing

expanding infrastructure. Others are focused on increasing adoption, affordability, resilience, or digital literacy.

These differences are not obstacles to cooperation. They are precisely why cooperation matters. When countries share their experiences, they gain insights that no single regulatory system could develop alone. One nation's success in spectrum management may help another accelerate wireless deployment.

Innovations in satellite regulation can improve connectivity far beyond the country in which they originated.

Advances in cybersecurity, emergency communications, artificial intelligence, or network resilience become stronger when governments, industry, and researchers exchange ideas openly and learn from one another.

That spirit of collaboration has long defined communications policy across the Americas. Whether through regional organizations, bilateral partnerships, or international institutions, we have consistently demonstrated that cooperation expands opportunities for everyone involved.

We have a perfect opportunity to demonstrate that cooperative spirit as a region in proposals for the upcoming ITU Plenipotentiary Conference and the 2027 World Radio Communications Conference. The WRC, in particular, provides an opportunity to take some bold steps to advance regulatory flexibility – at the international level – that will enable innovation, encourage investment, and ensure regulatory frameworks keep pace with rapidly evolving technologies and changing market needs.

The United States values opportunities to engage with partners across this hemisphere because every conversation improves our own understanding. We have much to share, but we welcome the chance to learn from the experience of others as well.

Some of tomorrow's most important communications innovations may emerge from Bogotá, São Paulo, Santiago, Kingston, San José, Mexico City, or from cities that are not yet recognized as technology hubs today. Innovation is not limited by geography. It flourishes wherever talented people are given the opportunity to solve difficult problems.

Our collective responsibility is to ensure that public policy does not unnecessarily stand in the way. As regulators, we have the privilege of helping shape the environment in which that innovation occurs. We do so most effectively when we remain open to new ideas, willing to learn from one another, and committed to building relationships grounded in trust and mutual respect.

That is the enduring value of gatherings like this one. They remind us that while our policies may differ, our aspirations are remarkably similar. We all want communications networks that are more secure, more resilient, more innovative, and more capable of expanding opportunity for the people we serve.

Working together gives us the best opportunity to achieve those goals.

Looking Toward the Next Generation

Against the backdrop of the four principles I have discussed today, we now find ourselves at another defining moment in the history of communications.

But this is something that we have experienced before. Yes, the technologies are different. But the responsibility is the same. Our responsibility is not to determine which innovations will succeed or to write every chapter of the digital future ourselves.

Our responsibility is to create the conditions in which innovation can flourish, investment can grow, competition can thrive, and citizens can benefit from the extraordinary opportunities that communications technologies make possible.

Although the principles I have discussed reflect the American experience, I believe they speak to something much broader.

Around the world, many governments are working toward many of the same goals: expanding opportunity, strengthening security and resilience, encouraging investment, connecting underserved communities, and ensuring that communications networks are there for people not only in moments of opportunity, but also in moments of greatest need. Those are shared aspirations.

The digital economy has become one of the defining engines of global prosperity. The policies we adopt today will shape not only the technologies of tomorrow, but perhaps more importantly the opportunities available to future generations.

That is an extraordinary responsibility. It is also an extraordinary privilege. As regulators, may we commit to approach that responsibility with confidence and humility.

Confidence that thoughtful public policy can help create the conditions for remarkable innovation. Humility to recognize that the most transformative ideas often come from places we do not expect and from innovators we have not yet met.

If we continue building regulatory systems that encourage investment, preserve competition, remain open to innovation, and strengthen cooperation across the Americas and around the world, I am confident that the next generation of communications technologies will create opportunities even greater than those imagined by the engineers who laid that first telegraph cable across the Atlantic.

Their achievement connected continents. Ours can help usher the next generation of global connectivity, building on their vision and expanding what is possible.

Thank you. It has been an honor to be with you today, and I look forward to continuing our work together to build a more connected, more innovative, and more prosperous future.