

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI**

Re: *Procedures for Commission Review of State Opt-Out Requests from the FirstNet Radio Access Network*, PS Docket No. 16-269; *Implementing Public Safety Broadband Provisions of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012*, PS Docket No. 12-94; *Implementing a Nationwide, Broadband, Interoperable Public Safety Network in the 700 MHz Band*, PS Docket No. 06-229; *Service Rules for the 698-746, 747-762, and 777-792 MHz Bands*, WT Docket No. 06-150.

Last month, I visited West Virginia. In Clendenin, I stood on a hill and saw homes that just weeks before were entirely underwater during a once-in-a-lifetime flood. In Clay, I visited a 911 call center at which heroic dispatchers continued to take calls and help people in need even as floodwaters entered the building and destroyed critical equipment. These were just the latest reminders that first responders in small towns across America—not just those in our largest cities—need reliable access to public safety communications.

That brings me to this *Order*. In the Spectrum Act of 2012, Congress charged the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) with establishing a nationwide, interoperable public safety broadband network. A nationwide network necessarily includes coverage of rural areas. Although this *Order* does not adopt a specific rule that requires FirstNet to meet rural deployment benchmarks, I'm satisfied that we have made substantial progress in this regard. The *Order* makes clear that FirstNet has a statutory duty to ensure substantial rural coverage.¹ It recognizes that FirstNet has incorporated rural coverage benchmarks into its procurement process.² And it specifically states that the FCC will monitor deployment in rural areas in order to ensure that FirstNet has met its legal obligations.³

These steps are critical to promoting public safety. Painful experience teaches us that Clay, West Virginia,⁴ Oso, Washington,⁵ and Ascension Parish, Louisiana⁶ won't be the last rural communities to need a communications lifeline in times of distress.

¹ *Order* at para. 40 (citing Spectrum Act § 6206(b)(3)).

² *Order* at paras. 40–43 (citing FirstNet's Request for Proposal (Jan. 13, 2016), *available at* <http://go.usa.gov/xDjcJ>).

³ *Order* at para. 45.

⁴ See WCHS8 Eyewitness News, "Clay County devastated by flooding, in desperate need of donations" (June 26, 2016), *available at* <http://bit.ly/2bEIUXO>.

⁵ See NBC News, "Oso Mudslide: Residents Remember Tragedy One Year Later" (Mar. 22, 2015), *available at* <http://nbcnews.to/2bLcXxh>.

⁶ See Weather Channel, "Nearly a Third of All Ascension Parish Homes Flooded as Levee Fails Amid Deadly Flooding" (Aug. 16, 2016), *available at* <http://wxch.nl/2bbldl5>.