

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI

Re: *Accelerating Wireline Broadband Deployment by Removing Barriers to Infrastructure Investment*, WC Docket No. 17-84.

“Why is my Internet so slow?” “I don’t like being stuck on DSL.” “There’s a fiber line a few blocks away, but I’m still stuck on copper.” “I want some high-speed competition.” These are the core concerns I’ve heard from consumers when I hit the road. I’ve heard them in big cities and small towns alike, from the Deep South to the Mountain West.

One reason why these complaints persist is that regulations can make it difficult, if not impossible, to upgrade from the fading networks of yesterday to the high-speed networks of tomorrow. This FCC is changing that. Last November, we took steps to accelerate the transition to next-generation networks. Today, we do even more to modernize our rules. These reforms can free up billions of dollars which carriers can devote to building new networks instead of propping up old ones. This is especially important in rural America, where the business case for building broadband is often hard.

The end result of all these efforts will be more rapid deployment, which means better, faster broadband and more competition for American consumers.

One example of a reform we adopt today is our decision to streamline the discontinuance process for low-speed data services if a carrier is already providing high-speed broadband—i.e., at least 25/3 Mbps. This links regulatory relief to the provision of high-quality replacement services, which will both encourage the building of modern networks and ensure that consumers are protected.

Another example is our decision to extend streamlined notice procedures for *force majeure* events to all network changes. This will allow carriers to restore services as quickly as possible following events like hurricanes. As I’ve personally seen in Houston and Miami and Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, the top communications priority in the wake of disasters needs to be getting systems back up and running, not running a regulatory gauntlet.

Yet another example is our decision to forbear from carriers having to jump through hoops to discontinue a service nobody is using. Regulations like this offer no benefits and impose costs. This is just the kind of underbrush we need to clear.

And then there are the regulations that are a solution in search of a problem. The prior FCC adopted inflexible and burdensome outreach requirements. But companies have strong incentives to communicate with customers during a technology transition without such mandates. After all, carriers don’t want to lose an existing customer having just invested in upgrading their networks. And the fact that the market is working without these burdensome mandates is proven, ironically, by their supporters. One party arguing to keep these mandates said they were responsible for a “relatively smooth and seamless technology transition.”¹ The only problem is that these requirements aren’t even in effect. Carriers were working to inform customers *without* the mandate.

And then there are the regulations that are like the party guest who still hangs around long after the music stops. For instance, we get rid of a rule requiring carriers to put on public notice network changes that “will affect the manner in which customer premises equipment is attached to the interstate network.” This came from a bygone era when carriers often had equipment affiliates and the Commission was concerned that incumbents would use their transmission facilities to favor their affiliates. Since then the marketplace has dramatically changed, and so too should our rules.

¹ See Pennsylvania PUC Wireline FNPRM Reply at 14.

I would like to thank all of the dedicated staff that contributed to making this result possible. From the Wireline Competition Bureau: Michele Berlove, Megan Capasso, Lisa Hone, Dan Kahn, Celia Lewis, Pam Megna, Kris Monteith, and Terri Natoli; from the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau: Garnet Hanley and Catherine Matraves; from the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau: Susan Bahr, Rosaline Crawford, Eliot Greenwald, and Suzanne Singleton; and from the Office of General Counsel: Valerie Hill, Billy Layton, and Rick Mallen.