

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI**

Re: *Children’s Television Programming Rules*, MB Docket No. 18-202; *Modernization of Media Regulation Initiative*, MB Docket No. 17-105

When I was a child in rural Kansas in the late 1970s and early 1980s, watching television meant using a TV set to view one of four broadcast channels. And the available children’s programming largely consisted of Saturday morning cartoons (*He-Man* and *Thundarr the Barbarian* were particularly savored) and PBS shows like *Sesame Street* and *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*. But things are very different for kids today. A wide range of children’s educational programming is available to them not only from broadcast television, but through cable channels, over-the-top providers, and the Internet. When my own kids talk about watching TV, for instance, they typically have in mind streaming one of their favorite videos on an iPad.

Unfortunately, the FCC’s current children’s television rules don’t reflect the vast changes that have revolutionized the video marketplace in recent years. It’s beyond time to take a fresh look at our “kidvid” regulations and explore how they should be modernized. I’d like to thank Commissioner O’Rielly for taking the lead in formulating this *Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*.

This item tees up a number of important issues, but there are two in particular that I’d like to highlight. First, our current rules discourage broadcasters from airing children’s educational programs that are less than 30 minutes long. This unfairly discounts the value of short-form programs, which can educate and inform young audiences, and which are more appealing to kids with sub-30 minute attention spans. *Schoolhouse Rock!*, for example, taught millions of children about gravity, the function of conjunctions, the preamble to the U.S. Constitution, and how a bill becomes a law. I’m glad we’ll examine how to reform our rules to treat this programming more fairly.

Second, our current rules also discourage broadcasters from airing children’s educational specials. But broadcasters should have the flexibility to provide a mix of regularly scheduled weekly programming and specials designed for children. We shouldn’t be skewing the marketplace against programming like the classic *ABC Afterschool Specials*. For over two decades, these specials, which aired in the late afternoon, dealt with important issues facing young people like substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, and illiteracy. So, as we move forward in this proceeding, I hope that we’ll figure out how best to modify our rules to remove the disincentive against airing special programming.

Thank you to the dedicated staff who made this *Notice* possible: Kathy Berthot, Steven Broecker, Michelle Carey, Martha Heller, Tom Horan, Barbara Kreisman, Evan Morris, Mary Beth Murphy, and Holly Saurer from the Media Bureau, and Susan Aaron and David Konczal from the Office of General Counsel. Like the prepositions in *Schoolhouse Rock!*, they are “busy, busy, busy,” and we appreciate all of the work they’re doing to modernize our media regulations.