

**STATEMENT OF  
CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI**

Re: *Inquiry Concerning Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans in a Reasonable and Timely Fashion*, GN Docket No. 19-285.

Today, we initiate our annual review of the status of broadband deployment in the United States. Since I became Chairman in January 2017, the Commission's top priority has been to close the digital divide, and the evidence demonstrates that we are moving in the right direction. Our last *Broadband Deployment Report*, for example, showed that the number of Americans without access to 25/3 Mbps service fell by more than 18% in 2017. In 2018, fiber was deployed to more American homes than any year before. And broadband investment increased in 2017 and 2018, after falling in 2015 and 2016.

But of course, our work is not yet done. That's why we're continuing to reform our universal service programs to promote additional rural broadband deployment. Earlier this year, for example, we proposed, over the partial dissents of two Commissioners, to establish the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, which could connect 4 million or more unserved rural homes and businesses to high-speed broadband. And that's why we're continuing to modernize our regulations to strengthen the business case for companies to expand and improve their broadband networks. Our goal is simple: to provide digital opportunity to every American who wants it.

As we advance toward that goal, our policies must be based on facts—not assertions that fall apart when subjected to even a bit of scrutiny. Take, for example, one of my dissenting colleague's assertion that "Internet inequality is deepening." This is as catchy as it is divorced from reality. The fact of the matter is that fewer Americans than ever before lack access to high-speed broadband networks. And the gap between urban and rural access dropped from 29.9% to 24.7%, according to our most recent *Broadband Deployment Report*.

Additionally, both of my dissenting colleagues are critical of our proposal to continue to use data taken from our Form 477 in our next *Broadband Deployment Report*. I agree that this data has shortcomings; that's why the Commission two months ago voted, over their partial dissents, to adopt the new Digital Opportunity Data Collection, which will collect more precise and granular data from broadband service providers and incorporate public feedback on the accuracy of that data.

To be sure, I wish that we could just snap our fingers and implement this new data collection immediately. But that's not the way the real world works. Given the legal requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act and the practical steps that must be taken to commence the Digital Opportunity Data Collection, it is simply impossible to get this data collection off the ground and completed before the legal deadline for our next *Broadband Deployment Report*. Indeed, my dissenting colleagues offer no suggestions at all for how this could possibly get done (if they do have any, I'm all ears). Therefore, we are proposing to continue to use Form 477 data for the time being, especially since it allows for an apples-to-apples comparison that will allow us to more easily measure progress from last year's *Report*. To the extent that stakeholders suggest alternative data sources, this *Notice of Inquiry* expressly invites them to submit them (notably, my dissenting colleagues do not offer any).

In short, today's item is just the beginning of the process of fulfilling our statutory duty to report on the state of broadband deployment in the United States. It will help us build the record we will use for that analysis. I look forward to reviewing the record that develops and conducting our analysis based on the best data that the record supports, including any specific improvements on our proposals that commenters or my fellow Commissioners recommend.

