STATEMENT OF

COMMISSIONER BRENDAN CARR

Re: *Establishing a 5G Fund for Rural America*, GN Docket No. 20-32.

Over the last few years in this job, I've had the privilege of meeting a whole bunch of Americans where they live—from the packed streets of Philly's Sharswood neighborhood, to the dusty dirt roads outside of Arcadia, Indiana. There have been some interesting conversations around kitchen tables, in firehouses, and even on top of water towers. And in all of those diverse conversations, do you know what I've never been asked?

"When will my family get DOCSIS 4.0?"

"Why don't we have multi-strand fiber to my neighborhood node?"

Not even—and, oh, how I hate to admit this—"How is my local small cell's 5G NR coming along?"

Never, not once, have I ever been asked any of those questions. Instead, I've been asked more times than I can count, in words and in action, the following:

"When will we get fast Internet? My family, my business—we need fast Internet. Please help."

We have helped, and it's one of the great honors of being at the FCC. Partnering with the private sector, we've made it easier to build broadband networks. We've brought to market more spectrum than ever before. We've fostered a 5G workforce through training, education, and awareness. And this approach has given providers the confidence to invest their resources in infrastructure and services to bridge the digital divide.

Preferring that technology lead and the private sector fund fast Internet has required us to be nimble. As for the technology, this Commission has been focused on results. I've spliced fiber with workers who connected a record-breaking 6.5 million homes last year. I've climbed grain elevators with WISPs that will beam high-speed service from any structure tall enough to see their customers miles away. I've been up a few towers because 5G can provide competitive in-home access, too. In fact, as of last week, all three of our national wireless providers have turned on their broadest-coverage 5G and have in-home offerings delivered over wireless. And the newest tech in space, low-earth orbit satellites, promise to reach nearly every home in our country with speeds and latency that previously only city dwellers had access to.

With this record of results, leveraging a vast variety of technologies, it is now more important than ever that we be careful with how we spend Americans' money on broadband. To be good stewards, to treat ratepayers' dollars as our own, we need to focus on what the people we serve actually care about: fast Internet, by whatever means. And we need to stretch support dollars by ensuring that the government doesn't compete against private sector infrastructure.

This is a good problem to have. If we're concerned about overbuilding, it means the private sector on its own has stepped up to connect hard-to-serve communities. If we're worried about our previously siloed support programs overlapping, it's a sign that providers are converging—that technologies are advancing and competing against each other to serve communities. Convergence gives us new routes to the same destination: fast Internet.

With this backdrop, the item we adopt today moves in the right direction. For a start, it builds off of other successful programs, since providers can use existing support to build fixed networks that support 5G. For example, a provider that receives RDOF funding to build out a network could use their previous investment to submit a lower bid in the 5G Fund auction. And this item seeks better data so that

we can target support where it's needed most, mindful of the large and growing investment that the private sector is making on its own. As we go forward in this proceeding, and with our support programs more generally, we should do so mindful of the increasingly competitive and converged market for connectivity—one where a range of technologies are competing to bridge the last mile in rural America.

I want to thank the Rural Broadband Auctions Task Force, the Wireline Competition Bureau, the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, and the Office of Economics and Analytics for their work on this item. It has my support.