

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI**

Re: *All-Digital AM Broadcasting*, MB Docket No. 19-311; *Revitalization of the AM Radio Service*, MB Docket No. 13-249.

Freddie Mercury memorably sang in Queen's 1984 hit *Radio Ga Ga*, "radio, someone still loves you." 36 years later, that remains true; I love radio, as do millions of my fellow Americans. And that love extends to the AM band.

Some may think of AM radio as quaint, but AM stations are vital to the communities they serve. I've seen it for myself at KZPA in Fort Yukon, Alaska, WRDN in Durand, Wisconsin, WAGG in Birmingham, Alabama, and many other stations across the country. AM broadcasters cover local events and our favorite sports teams. They provide a forum for public discourse. They offer foreign-language programming. And in emergencies, they are a life-saving source of information—like during the wildfires our nation has been battling in the West, or the hurricanes that have hit our coasts.

Under my leadership, the Commission has taken a series of steps to help AM broadcasters confront the economic and technical challenges they face. For example, as part of our AM Radio Revitalization Initiative, over 2,800 AM broadcasters have been able to obtain authorizations to build FM translators, and 2,100 are already licensed and on the air. Countless AM broadcasters have told me that their FM translators have given their stations a new lease on life. We've also eliminated and modified a number of rules to reduce unnecessary regulatory costs on AM broadcasters.

But to better ensure the future of AM radio, we need to squarely confront the band's problems, foremost among them poor signal quality and listening experience. And confront them we do today, allowing AM broadcasters in an increasingly digital age to voluntarily move to all-digital broadcasting.

Making the transition to all-digital service presents a singular opportunity to preserve the AM service for future listeners. All-digital signals offer better audio quality, with greater coverage, than existing AM stations—whether analog or hybrid. The decision to convert to all-digital will ultimately be up to each AM broadcaster. AM broadcasters can decide how best to adapt their service to the conditions in their local markets. And by requiring AM broadcasters to give their listeners advance notice if a station will no longer be available on analog receivers, we ensure that any transition will be consumer-friendly. We also clarify a number of technical specifications for digital broadcasting to ensure clear signals with minimal interference. In short, what we're doing today is enabling commercial AM radio—which will turn 100 years old next week—to compete in a digital media landscape, hopefully presaging another century of AM radio.

My gratitude to Commission staff that prepared this item: from the Media Bureau, James Bradshaw, Michelle Carey, Christine Goepp, Thomas Horan, Jerry Manarchuck, Holly Saurer, and Lisa Scanlan; from the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, Christine Clearwater and Austin Randazzo; from the Office of Communications Business Opportunities, Belford Lawson; from the Office of Economics and Analytics, Eugene Kiselev, Emily Talaga, and Andrew Wise; and from the Office of General Counsel, Susan Aaron, David Konczal, and Royce Sherlock.

I also want to thank my friend Ben Downs of Bryan Broadcasting. He hosted me at his AM station in College Station, Texas many years ago and planted a bug in my ear about this idea. I'm glad he and other dedicated advocates like him have so ably advocated for this cause. He firmly believes of AM radio, as Freddie Mercury aptly put it in *Radio Ga Ga*, "You had your time, you had the power / You've yet to have your finest hour." I hope so, too.