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For Immediate Release

STATEMENT OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
Announces Pilot Program to Release Commission Documents to the Public

WASHINGTON, February 2, 2017.—One of my priorities as Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) will be to make the agency’s operations more transparent. I identified many ways of doing that when I served as a Commissioner in the minority, and I want to deliver on those ideas now that I have the privilege of serving as Chairman. I want this Commission to be as open and accessible as possible to the American people. I want us to do a better job of communicating with those we are here to serve.

When a U.S. Senator or Representative introduces a bill, that legislation is soon thereafter made available to the general public. Before any debate begins about the bill, anyone, anywhere can read it. That’s not how things work at the FCC. The text of a document that the FCC votes on at its monthly meetings is sent to Commissioners at least three weeks before the vote, but it isn’t released publicly until *after* the vote takes place. This is precisely the opposite of transparency.

Now, that’s not to say that the contents of FCC proposals and orders remain secret to everyone. Lobbyists with inside-the-Beltway connections are typically able to find out what’s in them. But the best that average Americans will get is selective disclosures authorized by the Chairman’s Office—disclosures designed to paint items in the most favorable light. More often, the public is kept completely in the dark.

Today, we begin the process of making the FCC more open and transparent. I’m pleased to announce this morning a pilot project that, if successful, will become a Commission practice—one that will give the public much more insight into the Commission’s activities. Specifically, at the end of my remarks, I will be releasing two documents that I have presented to my fellow Commissioners for a vote at the FCC’s February meeting. The first is a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) that seeks comment on allowing television broadcasters to use ATSC 3.0, the next-generation broadcast standard. And the second is a Report and Order giving AM radio broadcasters more flexibility in siting their FM translators.

An NPRM and a Report and Order are essentially the beginning and the end of a conversation that an administrative agency has with the American public about regulation. One announces a proposal and asks for public input; the other takes stock of that input and announces a decision. I have deliberately chosen one NPRM and one Order for purposes of this test run. Between now and our monthly meeting on February 23, we will closely assess how the process plays out with respect to these items. Should things go well, my hope is to make it the norm to publicly release, well in advance, the text of all agenda items for monthly Commission meetings. And my goal is a simple but powerful one: equal access to the administrative process.

I would like to thank Chairman Greg Walden of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Representative Adam Kinzinger, and Senator Dean Heller, the original sponsors of the FCC Process

Reform Act. That legislation, which includes this and other common-sense reforms, unanimously passed the House last week. I also want to thank Commissioner O’Rielly for championing this reform during his time at the Commission. And I look forward to working with him and Commissioner Clyburn in the months to come on additional ways to bring more transparency to the FCC.

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).