

**OPENING REMARKS OF FCC COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI
AT MISSOURI BROADCASTERS ASSOCIATION CONVENTION'S
AM RADIO REVITALIZATION PANEL**

MAY 31, 2013

I'd like to thank the Missouri Broadcasters Association for inviting me to introduce today's panel on AM radio revitalization. Eleven days ago, I was reminded of the critical role that broadcasters play when disaster strikes. As severe weather threatened Central Oklahoma, local radio and television stations warned residents to take cover. Those warnings saved more than a few lives when an EF-5 tornado barreled through the town of Moore thirty-six minutes later.

For many of you, the tragedy in Oklahoma probably brought back memories of the catastrophic tornado that struck Joplin just a little over two years ago. In the wake of the Joplin tornado, when mobile phone service and the Internet were all but wiped out, broadcasters led by KZRG-AM 1310 provided around-the-clock, uninterrupted coverage for nine consecutive days. KZRG told residents how to get disaster relief and connected people in need with people who could help. The residents of Moore, Oklahoma have a long road ahead of them, but if they need inspiration for how to rally and recover, they can look to Joplin as a model.

The story of KZRG demonstrates the importance of AM radio in times of crisis. But AM radio plays an important role in towns throughout the United States every single day. AM stations cover local politics and host debates about local issues. They cover community events, such as high school sports. And they reach out to all parts of society, with programming targeted at minorities, people who speak foreign languages, and the elderly.

We all know that AM broadcasters today face a lot of challenges. Statistics tell the story. In 1978, half of all radio listening was on the AM dial; in 2010, that number was only 17%. For listeners under the age of 35, that percentage drops to single digits. And since 1990, the number of AM stations has decreased while the number of FM stations has almost doubled. Why is this? Based on my own experience, AM signal quality seems to be a major factor. Due to widespread interference, it seems to get tougher each day to receive a clear AM signal.

To address these challenges, I proposed last year that the FCC launch an AM Radio Revitalization Initiative. The last time the FCC comprehensively reviewed its AM radio rules was over two decades ago. I think it's time we do so again. Since I made this proposal, I've been amazed by the outpouring of support from broadcasters across the country. They've shared many ideas with me for improving the AM band, and I know that you'll be discussing some of them today.

Such as: How can the FCC make it easier for AM broadcasters to obtain an FM translator? Should we eliminate the AM ratchet rule? Should we replace the current minimum efficiency standard with a minimum radiation standard? Should we modify community of coverage standards? And what about the long-term future of the band? Should our goal be to transition stations to all-digital? Or are there other options we need to think about?

These are just a few of the questions that I hope you'll address during today's panel. And in the time to come, I'd like you to continue to "show me" your proposals on AM radio, as a good Missourian might say. I'm sorry that I couldn't be with you, but I do wish you all the best for a successful convention. And to quote Randy Newman, I want all broadcasters to know that when it comes to the AM band, "You've got a friend in me."