

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
AT PROJECT GOAL'S CONFERENCE ON
'AGING AND TECHNOLOGY: CREATING OPPORTUNITIES
TO AGE WELL WITH INNOVATION'**

WASHINGTON, DC

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It's great to be with all of you today. It's always a pleasure to be with Project GOAL, especially your outstanding leader, Debra Berlyn, who I'm also proud to call my friend.

A little over a year ago, in October 2016, I was honored to keynote a Project GOAL event at the National Press Club. I spoke about my Digital Empowerment Agenda. And I discussed all the things the FCC could do to expand digital opportunity to Americans—including those on, shall we say, the upper half of the age distribution.

I will readily confess that I did not expect back then that I would actually be in a position to implement that agenda. But I'm pleased—and grateful—to have been given the opportunity to follow through. More on that later.

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I grew up in Kansas, the child of first-generation immigrants from India. But much of my extended family remained in the subcontinent. The huge distance prevented me from building a stronger relationship with my grandparents and others an ocean away. I still remember very brief, 10-minute phone calls with my grandparents and “aerograms” in which they scribbled as much as they could on one piece of paper that also served as an envelope.

Today, my parents still live in my hometown of Parsons, Kansas, over 1,100 miles away. But they interact with their grandkids all the time. Of course, the Internet makes that possible. The life-enhancing, killer apps for bapama and papa (which is what my kids call my parents): FaceTime and YouTube.

There's a catch here, though. This is only possible because my parents have Internet access. But too many other older adults aren't online. Unfortunately, despite slow and steady gains, my parents' generation disproportionately finds itself on the wrong side of the digital divide.

Two-thirds of Americans over 65 use the Internet. Half have a home broadband connection. And two-fifths have a smartphone. These numbers reflect progress. But they also reflect a connectivity gap. Compared to the overall population, older adults' Internet usage is 23 percentage points lower, home subscriptions are 22 points lower, and smartphone adoption is 35 points lower.

We need to close those gaps. Getting everyone connected could tremendously improve the lives of older adults. New technologies empower older Americans to live independently like never before. For instance, remote health monitoring can cut down on visits to the doctor and allows health issues to be treated before they become an emergency. Sensors can notify help in case of a fall—a major risk for aging populations. Aging in place keeps older Americans happier. It gives children peace of mind. And it can also save a lot of money for people on fixed budgets.

And those are just home improvements, so to speak. I've met with the leadership of Gallaudet University's Technology Access Program, which has been doing pioneering work on technologies like real-time text. These technologies can help people with hearing loss—a challenge that afflicts an estimated 50 percent of Americans over 75.

And I've met with engineers developing self-driving cars, who see older adults as one of the populations that could benefit most from this technology.

And I've met with the head of the Cleveland Clinic's mobile stroke unit, who showed me how wireless technologies have helped cut the average time for assessment and stabilization of a patient by 38 minutes. This is critical, considering that a stroke victim's brain loses two million brain cells every minute.

So the benefits of connectivity to those of a certain age are clear. But that begs the question of how we provide that connectivity. Today, I want to talk about what we're doing to deliver it to all Americans.

Since I became Chairman, we've been focused on updating our rules to ensure that high-speed infrastructure is built and maintained everywhere. That means, in part, removing regulatory barriers that stand in the way of deployment.

One of the biggest drags on investment in faster, better, cheaper broadband has been the FCC's 2015 decision to scrap the tried-and-true, light-touch regulation of the Internet and replace it with heavy-handed micromanagement. In two weeks, we'll vote on a plan to restore Internet freedom and bring back the same legal framework that was governing the Internet three years ago today and that has governed the Internet for most of its existence. This will result in increased investment in infrastructure and more digital opportunity for seniors, especially in rural and low-income urban areas.

One aspect of this proposal I think is worth highlighting here is the flexibility it would give for prioritizing services that could make meaningful differences in the delivery of healthcare. By ending the outright ban on paid prioritization, we hope to make it easier for consumers to benefit from services that need prioritization—such as latency-sensitive telemedicine. Now, we can't predict exactly which innovations entrepreneurs will come up with. But by replacing an outright ban with a robust transparency requirement and FTC-led consumer protection, we will enable these services to come into being and help seniors.

Additionally, and as you may know, the FCC distributes federal subsidies for the purpose of promoting broadband. That's vital because too many rural areas—which tend to be disproportionately older as well—still lack high-speed Internet access. For this reason, we've revitalized our universal service programs to spur network deployment in unserved areas. Through our revamped Mobility Fund, the FCC will invest \$4.53 billion over the next decade to bring 4G LTE service to rural Americans who don't have it today. In addition, we'll direct \$2 billion through our Connect America Fund to boost fixed broadband in currently unserved locations. This is real money that will result in real infrastructure that will empower real people.

And in two weeks, the FCC will vote to launch a review of its Rural Health Care program. This important program helps health care providers pay for the connectivity needed for the latest telehealth tools. Our goal is to figure out how it can operate more efficiently *and* have a sufficient budget so that Americans can get the advanced health care they need.

On top of that, the FCC has also sought to make it easier and cheaper to install wired and wireless broadband networks. The next generation of these networks will require a lot of new infrastructure, from fiber in the ground and on poles to small cells. We're doing everything we can to make it easier to construct these networks so that consumers can be connected at home and on the go.

I could go on, but I think you get the point: this FCC is very focused on delivering digital opportunity to all Americans, especially seniors on the wrong side of the digital divide.

Now, I know today's event is focused on Internet technologies, but I'd be remiss if I didn't mention an issue of special concern to older Americans and to me—robocalls.

Robocalls are the number one source of consumer complaints at the FCC.

Right now, many unwanted robocalls are spoofed—that is, the caller ID is faked, hiding the caller’s true identity. Spoofed robocalls are often used by fraudsters to lure consumers into scams and avoid detection. We’ve seen callers pose as IRS agents to extract payments, for instance.

The primary targets of these scams are older Americans. That’s one reason why we’ve made tackling unwanted and illegal robocalls our top consumer protection priority.

Two weeks ago, the FCC voted to provide all consumers relief from robocalls. We allowed carriers to block telephone calls with spoofed phone numbers that can’t possibly be legitimate. We’ve cracked down on the IRS scam and similar schemes by empowering government agencies and businesses to put their numbers on a Do-Not-Originate list. We’re working with industry to develop rock-solid caller ID information, so seniors can answer the phone with confidence. And we’re taking aggressive enforcement action: we’ve already proposed \$200 million in fines against robocallers, including the largest fine ever sought by the FCC.

The scourge of unlawful robocalls is technically complex to address, and no single action will get the job done. But step by step, we’re working to give millions of older Americans peace of mind when the phone rings.

The same is true of the main reason we are here today—getting older Americans online. Doing that will require a lot of work and collaboration among government, consumer groups, the private sector, and an engaged public. That’s why forums like today are so important. Thank you for focusing attention on this issue. I look forward to working with all of you to unleash the power of digital technologies for older Americans.