

**REMARKS OF  
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
AT  
THE INDIAN TRAINING INITIATIVE  
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Thank you for your welcome. I have been looking forward to coming out here since I first heard about this conference because I really value the opportunity to talk with you, to better understand the problems you face, and to discuss with you what we can do – together—to bring the tools of the Telecommunications Revolution to every American.

I had the opportunity yesterday, along with Chairman Michael Powell, to visit our friends over at the Gila River Reservation to see the development and the difference that telecom can bring to people's lives and to discuss the many challenges and opportunities that we still have to work on. It was a wonderful and informative visit and I thank our friends there for hosting us.

I am pleased that this National Summit for Emerging Tribal Economies includes a Telecommunications Day. I want to commend Chairman Powell, Bureau Chief Dane Snowden, and so many people from the tribes, from the private sector, numerous American Indian organizations, and so many people in this audience for working together to make this day happen. For anyone looking toward economic development, every day should be Telecommunications Day because the communications technologies of the Information Age are the necessary keys for opening wide the doors of opportunity. Our job is to make sure that those doors are opened -- and that they remain open -- for *all* Americans, and not locked shut for some. There is no doubt in my mind that communities which lack access to communications technologies will be left behind, more isolated than ever and with comparatively fewer economic opportunities, as the rest of America moves forward toward the riches and wonders of the 21st first century.

Let me repeat to you today something I said in my first speech as an FCC Commissioner. My overriding goal is to help bring the best, most advanced, most accessible and cost-effective telecommunications system in the world to our people – and I mean *all* our people. Each and every citizen of this great country should have access to the wonders of telecommunications. I'd go further -- I don't think it exaggerates to characterize access to telecommunications in this modern age as a civil right.

I have an unswerving belief that we, as Americans, progress together or we progress not at all. Our strength is our diversity -- a diversity of races and cultures and creeds and talents and interests that will determine our destiny. Too many people see diversity as a problem to be overcome. It's not. It is an opportunity to be developed. It is America's unique asset. It's our leg up on the rest of the world. Unless we figure out

how to make maximum use of this amazing wealth of diversity, we will never even come close to realizing America's full potential.

My friend Tex Hall mentioned at our table during lunch a traditional old saying -- that American Indians are "many tribes, one family." That's a good way to think about this great country of ours with all its diverse people -- many tribes, one people.

Telecommunications is, I believe, key to realizing our country's full potential. There is no doubt in my mind that telecom and communications generally will drive this nation's development and prosperity in the Twenty first century. I know that a lot of the analysts and so-called experts are mired in doom and gloom these days, but I just do not share their fears. I believe that in telecom, you and I haven't seen anything yet. I believe that the communications transformations of this new 21<sup>st</sup> century will make the dramatic changes of the past century -- and they were dramatic -- pale by comparison. In this new century we will work differently, learn differently, play differently, and probably even govern ourselves differently, all because of the transformative power of telecommunications. Broadband is already becoming key to our nation's systems of education and commerce and jobs and, therefore, key to America's future. Broadband is going to be front-and-center in America's 21<sup>st</sup> Century transformation. Those who have access to advanced communications like broadband will win; those who don't will lose. I want to contribute to making sure we all get that access.

When we talk about bringing telecom to those who don't have access now, I want us to be expansive about it. I want the telecom that is provided to be as advanced as we can feasibly make it. Not just the "pots" but also the "pans." Not just the pots of Plain Old Telephone Service, but the Pretty Awesome New Stuff -- the pans -- too.

Although the world is clearly moving towards broadband communications, it is sad, but true, that too many Americans today still lack access to even basic telephone service. We need to ask ourselves why it is that well over 90 percent of our citizens have phones, but fewer than half of the households on many tribal lands have them. That's a national disgrace. It's not only an equity issue, but it is an economic development issue, as well. Without a vibrant, modern telecommunications infrastructure, 700,000 Native Americans who still live in poverty are denied a decent future. That is unacceptable. Beyond being an equity concern and an economic development issue, there is also a basic safety issue involved here. Without access to a telephone, people are cut off not only from jobs and educational opportunities, but also from emergency services, prompt medical care, and information that may be central to safety and even personal survival in this threatening age of global terrorism.

It's appropriate at a conference like this to stop for a moment and salute the progress that has been made toward meeting the communications needs of American Indian and Alaskan Native communities, even though we still have far to go.

- Two years ago, the Commission adopted an official policy statement to guide the interactions between the FCC and Tribal Governments. For the first time in its history, the Commission formally affirmed the principles of tribal sovereignty and the federal trust responsibility. That policy statement establishing a government-to-government relationship shows the mutual respect that must be the foundation for our work together. It is the underlying foundation for building policies to bring telecommunications to every corner of Indian Country.
- The Commission increased universal service support to reduce substantially the cost of phone service for the neediest in tribal communities.
- The Commission developed and provided incentives to encourage wireless carriers to serve those living on tribal lands.
- The Commission also held an Indian Telecom Training Initiative 2000 Conference to enhance our outreach efforts and deepen our understanding of the problems facing you and facing us.

These steps were a great start and I commend the previous Commission for its vision and leadership. Our challenge and our objective in the new Commission is not to rest on these accomplishments; it is to build on them. So it is time to look ahead, pleased that some progress has been made, but ever mindful of the long road we have yet to travel. It's a new and, in many ways an unfamiliar road, because while the old challenges of economic development and education and outreach have not disappeared, new challenges, born of technology and economic change, rise up to confront us. The question is: How do we get the job done? Here are some things I would recommend for us "to do."

***First, as we go about our FCC business, we need to reach out to all stakeholders on these issues.*** And that outreach must start at the top of the FCC. That is why I am here today and why I am so pleased that Chairman Powell also attended this conference and has been so instrumental in making Telecom Day happen.

You are affected by so much of what we do and we need to hear from you on all of it. I have seen already in my short time at the Commission that you have tremendous advocates in your communities, from tribal leaders to those running the tribally owned and operated telephone companies, to those Native Americans who helped shape this conference. We need a closer, better and ongoing dialogue among us all. I want to hear from you not only on the items immediately important to you, and they are many and I will talk about some of them, but I want your input on the whole wide range of telecom issues, because you are impacted by so many of these issues. I'd advise each of you to apprise yourself of the FCC's agenda for the next year -- those items that have been put out for comment and teed up for action. What we are going to vote on over the next nine months has the potential to fundamentally remake America's telecom and communications landscape, for better or for worse. These issues include the nature of

competition in the telephone industry; broadband deployment -- both how it will be deployed and how it will be regulated; universal service – what’s included, how will it be regulated, is it safe and secure for the long haul? There are all the important media ownership issues which go to the very heart of the localism and diversity and democracy that I think most of want to preserve and expand. Make no mistake: you and the people you represent *are* going to be affected -- deeply and profoundly affected -- by how these votes turn out. My recommendation is that you participate actively in all these proceedings. I know it’s a challenge to find the resources and the time to do that, but I’m a believer in the old adage that decisions without you are usually decisions against you. ***You can’t afford not to participate.***

Communications is the business of us all. Every great department and agency of government has a traditional group of constituents or clients -- stakeholders, I call them -- and their input and counsel are critically important to the success of that department or agency. Business is clearly an important stakeholder, and we at the Commission hear from business regularly and often. That’s as it should be. But in communications, every American is a stakeholder, because each of us is affected in so many important ways by how the public spectrum is used. So we need to hear from as many of these stakeholders as we possibly can – from Native Americans, minority groups, consumers, labor, the disability communities, the list goes on. They are all invested in the outcome of the decisions we make – so we need to hear from them going in.

Our outreach efforts must always be a two-way street. Conferences like this provide one excellent opportunity for an exchange of ideas. The present Commission has announced its intention to utilize more and different kinds of venues and formats for the exchange of thoughts, as Chairman Powell announced this morning. I welcome that. And I would welcome your direct input on what kinds of meetings or arrangements *you* think will best allow us to get on with the job of making telecom an integral part of Indian Country. The challenge is to make it happen, and I look forward to contributing my efforts to ensure that this initiative is a success and -- very importantly -- that it has the resources needed to get us into the kind of serious and sustained dialogue that is so obviously needed.

***Second, we must develop strategies with concrete action to bring telecommunications services and infrastructure to Indian Country.*** Listening is great. Talking is great. But actions speak louder than words and now is the time for all of us to “walk the walk.” We need concrete action and a resolve to keep our promises.

Action means completing universal service proceedings, including ones to make sure that the criteria for access to the low-income programs make sense for those living on tribal lands.

Action means finding a way for tribal members to benefit from universal service programs when they live *near* tribal lands just as those living *on* tribal lands can do. This is an issue crying out for attention. I was pleased that Chairman Powell mentioned this

earlier today. I look forward to expeditious action to bring our FCC proceeding on this matter to a conclusion. And I hope that conclusion is innovative and effective.

Action means streamlining our process for receiving universal service support for companies that serve tribal lands.

And action means making sure that our policies to promote wireless service on tribal lands are accomplishing their goals and that incentives are in place – real incentives – to ensure that our Tribal Lands Bidding Credits are a real and effective inducement for Native Americans to participate in spectrum auctions.

There is some creative thinking out there on how we might do all these things. I'm sure there's still more creative thought right here in this room today. All these ideas merit a good, hard and *expeditious* look. Time is not our friend here because these problems have waited too long for resolution. Time is not our friend when we are talking 20 and 30 and 40 per cent unemployment on the tribal lands. It just doesn't have to be that way – but neither will it get fixed unless and until we mobilize all of our resources to get it done.

***Third, we must address important newer issues, such as tower sitings, with the care and concern and sensitivity they merit.*** Here we have a lot of work to do. First and foremost, we have to guarantee that our processes show proper respect for tribal governments and cultural values. These towers, for example, hold the promise of bringing exciting new wireless technologies to Indian Country. Across the world in rural areas, where people are widely dispersed, wireless has the ability to serve populations that wireline simply lacks. But we need to find a way for towers to be respectful symbols of interconnectedness and not scars of division. Why build communications facilities in such a way as to rupture genuine communication? So we need to bring the Programmatic Agreement to a conclusion, remembering always that it is not simply an effort to streamline tower sitings, but to develop a sitings process mindful and respectful of Indian Country sensitivities.

***Fourth, we must implement.*** That means working together, in partnership. I have spent most of my years in Washington trying to build partnerships between business and government to make economic development happen. I spent eight years in the Clinton Administration putting such partnerships together with the goal of making America more successful in the export sector. Both the public sector and the private sector realized then, for the first time, that in a global economy where other governments worked every day with their enterprises to develop trade opportunities, our private sector acting alone couldn't get the job done, nor could the government acting alone make much difference. But when we pulled together toward a common goal, things began to happen.

I submit the same could happen here. All of us in this room -- tribes, business, government -- can do a better job of working together to develop innovative partnerships and solutions.

I look at these challenges, and I see a lot of work to be done to ensure that Indian Country is not consigned forever to the wrong side of the digital divide. Native Americans should not be the last Americans to reap the benefits of the Information Age. But I believe -- I really do -- that we can and we will get this job done. I want you to know that this issue is a priority for me. I have spoken about it many times. We cannot rest until we do justice -- real justice -- to the telecom needs of all the people represented by this audience today. I want to work proactively with you on these issues. My door is always open. I hope you will walk through it many times. I also want to spend more time visiting with you where you live. My hope is that at the end of my time at the FCC, we will be able to say that, together, we made progress, we made a difference. I look forward to working with you to make it happen.

Thank you for your welcome and your attention.