REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
AT CANTO 2018

PANAMA CITY, PANAMA

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Good evening! It's great to be here. Thank you to Chairman Wilkins, Secretary General Wankin, and the whole CANTO team for organizing this week's events.

And congratulations on this 34th annual CANTO meeting. I wasn't around for the first one in 1985—I suppose I was too busy enjoying Billy Ocean's "Caribbean Queen," which was a big hit the prior year. So this is my first time attending the annual meeting. My initial impression is that every international conference should have a theme song. I love it!

When you start a conference with a group sing-a-long, you're setting the bar pretty high. But I'm even more excited to engage with all of you and to exchange ideas and experiences over the next few days.

Let me add that I'm honored to be speaking in the closer's role for this session. But it is a little intimidating—not just because I have to follow so many impressive speakers, but because we are in Panama, home of the greatest closer in baseball history: Mariano Rivera of the New York Yankees, or El Cerrador.

Thinking of what to say today, I looked to this Panamanian baseball legend for inspiration. One of the most remarkable things about Mariano Rivera was that he was able to dominate hitters with only one type of pitch. At the end of his career, he threw his "cutter" roughly 90% of the time. Even though hitters knew what was coming, the pitch still worked.

Embracing this model of finding what works and sticking with it, the primary focus of my remarks will be the primary focus of my chairmanship since day one: closing the digital divide in order to make sure everyone can benefit from the Internet revolution.

I've made it my top goal to deliver digital opportunity to everyone in my country for the same reason that so many of you have done so in your countries: because access to the Internet means access to a better life.

Like you, I've seen the expert reports that try to quantify the economic and social opportunities created by wired and wireless connectivity. A recent McKinsey analysis detailed how broadband-enabled "smart city" applications could create jobs, reduce crime, clean the environment, and lower healthcare costs while improving outcomes, literally saving lives.

These analyses are valuable, but what compels me most—what *inspires* me—are the people I've met who are trying to make their way in the digital age. You may think that a country as large and resource-rich as the United States can't possibly understand the connectivity challenges of countries in the Caribbean region. But what I've seen in traveling around my country, including to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in the Caribbean, and hearing from regulators from all over the world is that we do share common challenges. And if we share common challenges, we can certainly share common strategies for addressing those challenges and increasing opportunities for all our citizens.

Since becoming Chairman, I've made it a point to get out of Washington, D.C., whenever possible. I've seen first-hand the ways that digital technologies are transforming communities. And I've also seen how inadequate Internet access is creating problems for the people and places being bypassed by the broadband revolution.

To date, I've visited roughly 90 cities in 33 states in the U.S., driving more than 8,500 road miles in some hard-working rental cars. To put 8,500 miles into perspective, that's more than the distance from Washington, D.C. to Ushuaia, the southernmost town in South America—and back to Buenos Aires. Or to put it in a different perspective, that's 166 trips through the Panama Canal. These road trips allow me to see remote places like Wisdom, Montana, population 98, that are challenging to reach with broadband.

What are some of the key lessons from this travel?

One is that no matter what you do for a living or where you do it, broadband is critical.

You wouldn't necessarily think of a potato farm in Idaho as a technology company. But I recently visited one that uses everything from an LTE-based soil analysis app to drones to improve productivity and reduce costs. On this same trip, I met a hop-producer that uses sensors that monitor the soil and advanced machinery that improves efficiency.

Even some of the oldest industries use the newest technologies. I recently visited a mine that relies on fiber and Wi-Fi to keep in touch with miners two miles below ground. That same company is using virtual reality to explore and evaluate uses for potential new, 150-ton equipment.

A second key lesson is that the communities that are the hardest to connect are also the places that have the most to gain from next-generation networks.

A few months ago, I was in Scottsville, Kentucky, a town of about 4,000 people. There was a hospital in the county, but no pediatrician. But now, thanks to a high-speed connection between the local school and Vanderbilt University's Children's Hospital 65 miles away, all a sick student has to do to see a top-notch pediatrician is walk to the school nurse's office.

And in Wardensville, West Virginia, I saw how broadband enabled a transcription-service company that requires massive video downloads to set up shop in this town of about 300 people and hire 28 full-time employees.

Access to broadband in small, rural communities means access to jobs, healthcare, and other opportunities that were previously unimaginable.

The third takeaway is that the costs of being on the wrong side of the digital divide are high and getting higher.

On a recent trip through Eastern Oregon, I heard from local officials about how the lack of high-speed broadband access is hurting the economy and is even making some residents less optimistic about the future. And a vivid illustration of the costs of being disconnected came on a visit to an Indian reservation in South Dakota. I heard the story of a woman who was found dead in her home, clutching her cellphone. She had dialed 911, the emergency number, 38 times—but never got a response. There simply wasn't wireless coverage.

I could stand up here and talk for a long time about what we are doing at the FCC to expand digital opportunity to more people. In fact, I will do just that (for a short time) during a separate session tomorrow.

But I share these stories today because as we kick off CANTO 2018, it's important that we never forget why we are here—why our work to expand digital opportunity matters. And that's because connectivity isn't just raising our standard of living, it's changing our way of life. High-speed broadband not only has the power to transform lives; it has the power to save lives.

That brings me to the final subject I wanted to highlight: disaster response.

This past year brought some of the most devastating hurricanes in recorded history to my country. In the wake of each storm, I visited the impacted areas. As bad as things were in Texas after the flooding

from Hurricane Harvey and Florida after Hurricane Irma, the devastation I saw in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands was even worse.

Many of your countries were also hit hard. That's why disaster response strikes me as an obvious area where we should be working together. We should learn from our experiences and develop best practices so that we're all better prepared and more effective in responding to future disasters.

We should all be looking at what worked in the past and where we can improve service availability and restoration. And we need to engage stakeholders, including the private sector and the public safety community.

I came away from my visits to the islands in awe of the work that is done by first responders. Emergency response is a life-and-death job. The highest stakes demand the highest standards. That's true of our first responders, who consistently amaze and inspire me. We owe it to them to make sure our emergency communications systems meet those same high standards.

Let me close with this. I may represent the largest country at CANTO by size. But I come from a rather small town. I grew up in a place called Parsons, Kansas, population 9,900. My upbringing gives me a unique appreciation for the importance of connecting communities that are in danger of being left behind in the digital age. Growing up in a small town also gives me a keen appreciation of community—an appreciation of what it means to be a good neighbor.

We may come from different countries, but we all share common bonds—bonds of geography and, more importantly, bonds of shared values. As your neighbor, I'm calling on all of us to work together to bring digital opportunity to all the people we are honored to serve.

Let's get to work.