

**REMARKS OF RACHAEL BENDER  
AT THE 33<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE  
CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATION OF NETWORK TELECOMMUNICATIONS ORGANIZATIONS**

**PUNTA CANA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

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Thank you for that warm welcome, and thank you to CANTO for inviting me to be here. It's great to be with you, and it's an honor to be representing the Federal Communications Commission and Chairman Pai.

Since we're in the Dominican Republic, naturally I'd like to start by talking about baseball. Per capita, the Dominican Republic has probably produced more baseball superstars than anywhere on earth: Pedro Martinez, David Ortiz, Manny Ramirez, Albert Pujols. The island also produced one of the game's most colorful characters, who was a star in his own right, Bartolo Colon.

Now while baseball is huge in the Dominican Republic and the United States, I fully appreciate that cricket is the sport of choice in the rest of the Caribbean; the West Indies cricket team has been the pride of the region for decades. Given that Antigua's Prime Minister, the Honorable Gaston Browne has been participating at the CANTO conference and given that CANTO's Chairman Julian Wilkins, also hails from Antigua, I would be remiss if I did not also recognize the prowess of Antigua's famous cricketing son, Sir Vivian Richards.

What do Bartolo Colon and Viv Richards have to do with today's conference? Let me explain.

When Colon debuted with the Cleveland Indians in 1997, he could throw 100 miles-per-hour but allowed nearly 6 earned runs a game. Last year with the New York Mets—my favorite team, by the way—he was the oldest player in baseball at 43 and his average fastball was in the 80s, but, thanks to extraordinary command and guile, he was an all-star. In fact, Colon has made as many all-star teams in his 40s as he did in his 20s and 30s combined. Likewise, Richards has brought the West Indies to victory in numerous test matches around the world.

Here's my point. Bartolo Colon and Viv Richards offer powerful examples that if you have a smart strategy it goes a long way toward achieving success. That's true in baseball and cricket, and I think it's also true in communications policy. Our nations enjoy varying advantages and disadvantages, but we can all increase our chances of success with a smart strategy and good execution—just like Colon and Richards. That's why meetings like CANTO are so important. We have all learned lessons and developed best practices from hard experience. Sharing these lessons can help us develop smarter solutions to our own unique domestic challenges.

I would add that it's particularly important that the United States and Caribbean nations collaborate. Our countries share many common interests and significant cultural and economic ties. The U.S. is the leading trading partner for the Caribbean, and we have benefitted greatly from the contributions of the Caribbean diaspora community in the United States. Unlike baseball, this is not a game where there is only one winner. When we expand opportunity and enhance security in one nation, the benefits can flow throughout the region.

Recognizing these benefits, Congress last year made it the official policy of the United States to increase engagement with government leaders, the private sector, and civil society groups in the Caribbean region.

I am proud to be here in the spirit of this law and want you to know that Chairman Pai is committed to enhancing the FCC's engagement with the Caribbean region. Last week at the Global Symposium for Regulators in the Bahamas, our International Bureau staff, Tom Sullivan and Roxanne-

McElvane Webber agreed to collaborate with the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority on a variety of areas, including exchanging information on ICT development policies and initiatives to close the digital divide. We are eager to form additional collaborations and I look forward to learning from you, but now is the time for me to share some of our recent experiences.

Let me begin by discussing the Commission's work to make sure everyone in the U.S. has access to modern communications. Communications for all is the central mission at the core of our founding statute. And since his first day on the job, Chairman Pai has been saying that bridging the digital divide is his top policy priority.

For all our prosperity, the plain truth is that millions of people in the United States are still being bypassed by the benefits of the Internet revolution.

Not surprisingly, the United States' most difficult and persistent connectivity challenges are in rural, sparsely populated areas. Just one number to offer some perspective: whereas only 2 percent of households in urban areas lack access to high-speed fixed broadband, that number jumps to 28 percent for rural areas.

The first step to solving any challenge is to acknowledge and assess it. Over the past month, Chairman Pai has taken two separate trips, logging more than 2,000 miles in the car and visiting over two dozen rural communities to shine the spotlight on the people and places on the wrong side of America's digital divide. These travels have also given Chairman Pai the opportunity to learn first-hand about the connectivity challenges in these areas, as well as the solutions many have developed to confront them. To be honest, Chairman Pai hardly needs to hit the road to understand the communications challenges of rural America. He was raised in a small rural town in the middle of the country, far from any big city, so his understanding of and commitment to connecting far-afield communities is deep and profound. And he has matched that commitment with an aggressive policy agenda.

What exactly are the policies we are pursuing to connect unserved Americans?

First and foremost, we are promoting a competitive free market for communications services that unleashes private investment and ingenuity.

To that end, the Commission is cutting bureaucratic red tape and removing regulatory barriers that slow the pace and increase the cost of network deployment. We've launched proceedings to help broadband providers access utility poles, site wireless infrastructure, and transition from yesterday's copper networks to modern fiber networks. The idea is simple: If we make it easier to install wired and wireless broadband infrastructure, we'll see private companies deploy more wired and wireless broadband infrastructure.

Sometimes the barriers for new market entrants are very high. So we need to be creative. This June, for example, the Commission approved a plan allowing a company to use satellites in low-Earth orbit to provide high-speed broadband. This could be a promising option for those living in hard-to-serve areas. Other satellite companies have already expressed interest in doing the same, signaling the possible emergence of a viable new competitive option for broadband in rural communities.

Of course, we know that we could strike every single FCC regulation from the books, and it still wouldn't make financial sense for carriers to roll out networks to certain sparsely populated areas. The FCC's preferred and proven strategy for spurring deployment in these places is to engage in public-private partnerships. The way it works is the FCC provides direct funding that leverages—not displaces—private capital expenditures. For example, the FCC recently voted to invest \$4.53 billion over the next decade through our Mobility Fund, which will bring 4G LTE service to rural Americans who don't have it today. In addition, we approved about \$2 billion through our Connect America Fund to boost fixed broadband in currently unserved locations.

These public-private partnerships are nothing new at the Commission. What is new is the way they are operated. The Commission now uses competitive bidding in a multiple-round, reverse auction to allocate these funds to private providers. The expectation is that this will maximize the impact of our investments in universal service.

One more note on bridging the digital divide: Although it is not clear what the ultimate proposal will look like, President Trump has declared that rural broadband will be part of the infrastructure package being crafted by the White House. The President's statement is a clear signal that broadband networks are a foundational building block for growth and job creation in today's and tomorrow's economy.

So far, I've talked about how to expand and enhance America's wired and wireless infrastructure. Allow me to shift for a moment to our invisible infrastructure: spectrum.

The iPhone celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> birthday a few weeks ago. This breakthrough device sparked an explosion in demand for wireless services that continues to expand a decade later. The FCC has been continually at work to make spectrum available to sustain the mobile revolution.

They say the iPhone changed everything, but the key principles guiding the FCC's spectrum policy are the same as they were before the smartphone era. First, our experience at the FCC is that the most effective way to put spectrum to its highest and most efficient use is to harness market forces. And our mechanism for doing so has been spectrum auctions. The second key pillar is flexible use. We basically make spectrum available and then do our best to stay out of the way of technological development and the details of implementation.

Beyond these high-level principles, our approach to spectrum is probably best described as all-of-the-above. We aim to free up all kinds of spectrum—low-, mid-, and high-band—for both licensed and unlicensed use. And we take a technology-neutral approach to allow innovations to develop from all parts of the industry.

Let's walk through what that looks like in practice.

On low-band, one of the biggest reasons the U.S. was the first country to deploy LTE networks at scale was that we moved early on our DTV transition, paving the way for the 700 MHz auction in 2008 that freed up airwaves that would be used for 4G wireless services. More recently, we concluded the world's first incentive auction. This two-sided auction will reallocate 84 MHz in the 600 MHz band from television broadcasters to wireless providers. And we have started issuing the first licenses to auction winners.

With regards to mid-band spectrum, Chairman Pai just circulated a proposal for consideration at the Commission's August open meeting that explores opportunities for next generation services—particularly for wireless broadband—in the 3.7 GHz to 24 GHz spectrum range and asks about how we can increase efficient and effective use of this spectrum for the benefit of all services and users.

Chairman Pai has also been particularly aggressive in his advocacy of using high-frequency spectrum previously thought to be unsuitable for mobile use. He helped drive the 2016 rules opening up significant swaths of millimeter-wave spectrum for 5G use. This move has given U.S. operators a clear path to launch next-generation services, but we're not done yet. At Chairman Pai's direction, we are considering possibilities for opening up even more spectrum for 5G as soon as possible.

One last note on spectrum is that the FCC recognizes the value of, and is committed to, international spectrum harmonization. Although it's still two years away, preparations have already begun for WRC-19, which represents a unique opportunity to set spectrum allocations and to harmonize technical operations regionally and internationally in a way that will aid the development and deployment of new and innovative services. Just a few weeks ago, FCC Commissioner O'Rielly was at CITEL's spectrum policy meeting in Orlando to work with representatives of many of your countries to begin

developing Inter-American proposals for the next WRC, to help advance the region's key priorities. We would like to work with all nations represented here on collaborating in preparation for WRC-19.

The last topic I'd like to discuss this morning, which offers insight into Chairman Pai's overall approach to government regulation, is the Commission's Restoring Internet Freedom proceeding.

From the Clinton Administration in the 1990s until 2015, the FCC took a light-touch, market-based approach to the Internet. That approach yielded approximately \$1.5 trillion in private investment in broadband networks. It created an online economy that gave birth to the world's most successful Internet companies. A light-touch approach allowed for the emergence of a digital ecosystem, including network operators, online platforms and over-the-top services, which transformed the industry, spurring innovative new business models, increasing the overall demand for broadband services and fueling growth in broadband infrastructure development. It empowered hundreds of millions of American consumers. And, yes, it produced a free and open Internet.

Two years ago, faced with all this good news, the FCC charted a dramatically different course, adopting an old regulatory framework called Title II—originally designed in the 1930s for the Ma Bell telephone monopoly—and applying it to thousands of Internet service providers, big and small. And after the FCC embraced utility-style regulation, the United States experienced the first-ever decline in broadband investment outside of a recession.

As for where this proceeding stands, we're currently getting public input on our proposal to return to the successful, light-touch approach that the Commission embraced until 2015. The first round of comments was due yesterday. After building a public record, the Commission will eventually decide how to move forward based on the facts, the law, and sound economics.

That's it for the substantive portion of my remarks, but I did have one last thought I wanted to leave you with. Unfortunately, I had to miss the opening ceremony of the conference. The reason that's so unfortunate is that it means I was unable to participate in the singing of the famous CANTO song. The good news is that I can still close my speech with these words from the song's chorus: "Let's face the world together . . . give strength to one another, let's take our places in a world of change right where we belong." We live in a world of technological change and our respective markets are made stronger by our continued collaboration and engagement. Let's face the world together to build a brighter digital future in the months and years ahead.

Thank you.