

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI**

Re: *Competitive Bidding Procedures and Certain Program Requirements for the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Auction (Auction 904)*, AU Docket No. 20-24; WC Docket No. 19-126; WC Docket No. 10-90.

If you fly for several hours and drive for several hours more, you can visit Ethete, Wyoming. It's a tiny town in the remote reaches of the Wind River Reservation. I visited Ethete earlier this month. There, I had a chance to meet Patrick Lawson, who runs Wind River Internet, a Tribally owned broadband provider. He described some of the challenges and opportunities of connecting Tribal members with broadband. I also met Tara and Marcus. They were busy connecting homes with gigabit-capable fiber offered by Wind River Internet but took time to share with me how the work gave them a sense of purpose, in addition to being a good job. And I met Tribal leaders who told me what a big difference this connectivity would make—from enabling Tribal members to apply for jobs to allowing kids to learn about their culture. The linchpin to this brighter future? The FCC. The digital opportunity being delivered on the Wind River Reservation was made possible in part by the FCC's Connect America Fund Phase II auction. For showing me what's being accomplished in the middle of winter in some of the most sparsely populated, challenging terrain in the country, I want to say, “Hohóu hinono’ei 3oowoo3nenitenoó”—thank you to the Northern Arapaho Tribe. (And I'll keep practicing the Arapaho you taught me!)

What's true in Wyoming is true everywhere else in rural America. Whether starting a business, furthering their educations, seeking high quality healthcare, or simply connecting with loved ones around the world, rural consumers need the same access to high-speed, dependable broadband as their counterparts in urban areas. That's why we are acting decisively with Phase I of the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction. We're building on the success of the CAF II auction to bring broadband to as many as six million unserved homes and rural businesses that we know for a fact lack broadband and are unlikely to get it any time soon without help. Today's item takes the next step in that process, seeking public input on a variety of proposals regarding the processes that will govern the auction, which is slated to begin in October.

Fair warning: many of the proposals we are making today seem rather technical and complicated. But they're essential to ensuring a competitive, fair, and efficient auction. This *Public Notice* will make sure that our limited universal service dollars bring the fastest broadband networks possible to as many Americans as we can. It will help determine everything from which service providers can participate and the way bidding in the auction will be conducted, to how the Commission will award support to bidders and vet them to ensure that they can deliver the services promised to their customers. I look forward to reviewing stakeholders' comments as we move forward to finalize the auction procedures and kick off bidding this fall.

I'd like to thank the many staff throughout the building that contributed to this item, including Craig Bomberger, Jonathan Campbell, Rita Cookmeyer, Amanda Hilfiger, Bill Huber, Shabnam Javid, Steve Kauffman, Alec MacDonell, Eliot Maenner, Giulia McHenry, Gary Michaels, Mark Montano, Steve Rosenberg, Linda Sanderson, Debbie Smith, Martha Stancill, Sue Sterner, and Margy Wiener from the Office of Economics and Analytics; Kirk Burgee, Nathan Eagan, Michael Janson, and Jonathan McCormack from the Rural Broadband Auctions Task Force; Talmage Cox, Lauren Garry, Trent Harkrader, Katie King, Heidi Lankau, Alex Minard, Kris Monteith, Ryan Palmer, and Gilbert Smith from the Wireline Competition Bureau; Stephen Buenzow, Ziad Sleem, and Thuy Tran from the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau; Sylvia Lam and Kerry Murray from the International Bureau; Barbara Esbin from the Office of Native Affairs and Policy; Maura McGowan from the Office of Communications Business Opportunities; and Richard Mallen, Malena Barzilai, and William Richardson from the Office of General Counsel.