

**Remarks of Robin Colwell, Special Assistant to the President for Economic Policy
Free State Foundation Telecom Policy Conference
March 10, 2020**

Thank you Randy for that warm welcome, and thanks so much for having me here today. I think we can all agree that Free State Foundation, and its founder, have done an amazing job with this Policy Conference, and many others, through the years. Randy has been a true leader on tech and telecom policy. He has always put together the most insightful events, and given us all some real food for thought, along with some real food, which is of course always very much appreciated. I myself have been a frequent flyer at this event for many years, accompanying my former bosses as a member of the audience, so it is a real delight and honor to be given the opportunity to address the group this year.

As Randy mentioned, after being fortunate enough to be able to follow my passion for tech and telecom policy on both sides of the Hill and the FCC, I took on a new challenge last year. Working at the White House has been the honor and the adventure of a lifetime. I'm very grateful to President Trump and Director Kudlow for giving me this opportunity. And I think that all of my previous experiences, and having had all of those different perspectives, has prepared me very well for my current role, which is what you might call the ultimate exercise in convergence. Integrating the work of the National Economic Council with that of my new and old friends in the White House, at the agencies and independent Commissions, in Congress, and in the private sector, always makes for an eventful but ultimately fulfilling day.

Broadband Beyond 2020 is the theme of this year's conference, and I know I don't need to convince anyone here of its importance. That connectivity has formed the very backbone of our economy, and has unleashed American innovation across every field. It has empowered Americans to connect instantly with each other and with resources never imagined before. In fact, for the first time this year, many attendees of this conference are watching via livestream on the Free State Foundation Facebook page... Randy is optimizing the connection! From an instant ride across town when it's raining, to an online course with a leading professor, to a quick consultation with a specialized medical expert from wherever you may happen to be, which is a particularly relevant use case given the news of the last few weeks, broadband is making our lives easier and better.

Ensuring access to this miracle of the modern world for every American is a goal many of us in this room have shared and worked together, across party lines, and across public and private sectors, to make a reality for much of our careers. And in 2020, we are recommitting and redoubling our efforts. In the coming days and weeks, we will see some of the important initiatives I worked on from the Hill perspective, and many of you worked on as well, come to fruition as President Trump signs into law the Pallone/Walden Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Act, as well as the Cornyn/Warner Secure 5G and Beyond Act, and the Wicker/Peters/Klobuchar Broadband DATA Act. Each of these bills moves the ball significantly toward the Administration's goals for secure, accessible broadband across the nation.

We are making great strides on closing the digital divide between urban and rural America. New data from the FCC just a few weeks ago showed substantial progress in the last two years, as the number of Americans with no options for at least 250/25 Mbps fixed terrestrial broadband service fell by 74%, and the number of Americans with no options for at least 25/3 Mbps service fell by 30%. That still leaves 18.3 million unserved Americans, so there is clearly more work for all of us to do, but the Commission took another significant step toward eliminating that number with its recent vote to approve the \$20 billion Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, as the USDA's ReConnect Program also continues to push connectivity further and further out.

As we look ahead to 5G, and its promise of ubiquitous, powerful wireless broadband, the Administration is pushing aggressively on all fronts to ensure American leadership. In his message last fall to the World Radiocommunications Conference, President Trump laid out three goals for the United States with regard to 5G wireless networks.

First, to deploy rapidly, using a free enterprise-driven approach. Strong domestic deployment is an absolute imperative, both to support the global trusted marketplace for equipment and services, and to deliver on the promise of 5G across America. As 5G services are rolled out and available to more and more Americans, that will create the palette from which American innovators can paint, showcasing their creative talents as the next generation of transformative applications – the next Uber or AirBNB – are born right here and rapidly adopted worldwide.

The Commission's efforts to streamline siting requirements will be of tremendous value as both the wireline and wireless industries make the necessary investments, rising to the challenge of delivering on this promise. The Commission's upcoming \$9 billion 5G fund will help ensure that rural America is not left behind in the evolution to 5G. But also, it is impossible to overstate the critical importance of mid-band spectrum to 5G domestic deployment. The Commission's Order setting the C-Band auction for later this year is a huge step in the right direction, and the Administration is continuing efforts to ensure sufficient spectrum is ready and available for 5G.

The second goal set by the President is to promote security in all aspects of 5G networks worldwide. The two bills sponsored by Chairman Pallone and Senator Cornyn will be very helpful in ensuring the replacement of untrusted equipment in American networks, and setting out a National Strategy to Secure 5G. These efforts are also extremely helpful in our ongoing engagement with allies and partners worldwide, as we share our knowledge of the risks of certain equipment and services, and lead by example to proactively address those risks in our own networks here at home. At the same time, we are offering policy and financing resources to our partners in order to facilitate the adoption of trusted alternatives, working with ExIm Bank and DFC to take full advantage of their authorities and prioritize 5G projects in the developing world. We look forward to this year's Prague 5G Security Conference, to be hosted by the Czech Republic in May, as an important forum for further discussions regarding the national security and economic considerations that must be part of each country's evaluation of potential 5G vendors.

The third goal is to maintain American leadership in 5G research and development. Here, too, there are some very exciting developments to discuss. The latest market trends in network

architecture – disaggregation, interoperability, and virtualization; end-to-end, from core to RAN – represent a true revolution in how wireless networks are built, and the cutting edge of the industry. They present tremendous opportunities in terms of greater efficiency, superior performance, better security, and ultimately a more robust, trusted supply chain. And leading those trends is an impressive and growing list of American innovators, large and small, established and startup.

This is a positive development for the United States, as well as the entire trusted ecosystem. And while continuing to push aggressively on domestic deployment and worldwide network security, we must also recognize the opportunity inherent in the market trends and seek to accelerate innovation – which is what America does best. We will further the conversation, highlighting the opportunities, while also considering the potential challenges that may lie ahead, at a Presidential Summit on 5G Innovation next month.

Once again, I appreciate the opportunity to share these thoughts with you. Thank you all, and enjoy the rest of the conference.