

power and defend First Amendment rights. Democrats on the Commerce Committee sent a letter asking again whether he believed the media were the enemy of the people, and he qualified his answer in the negative by writing that “the President has made clear he was referring to ‘fake news’ [as the enemy of the people].” I wish that were true, but it is not. The President referred to well-respected, mainstream media organizations.

The FCC must unequivocally stand up for the First Amendment, and the Chairman needs to strongly disavow the President’s unfounded attack on the media.

The FCC took a huge step forward in favor of consumers in 2015 when it passed the open internet order. That order, known as the net neutrality order, was codified. The principle underlying net neutrality is simple and fair. It means that internet service providers must treat all internet traffic equally. They cannot block access to particular websites, apps, or services. They can’t give fast lanes or special treatment to websites or apps that pay more or are favored by some companies’ executives.

Consumers benefit because internet service providers can’t “pick winners and losers in the online marketplace for services and ideas.” Those are the words of President Obama.

Our democracy benefits because the internet lowers the barriers to communication—but not if the massive companies that control infrastructure can erect new ones. As a Commissioner, Mr. Pai voted against that pro-consumer measure, and as Trump’s Chairman, he has now moved to dismantle it. The American people are outraged with the Chairman’s move to undo net neutrality. The Commission has received a record 22 million comments in that regulatory proceeding.

Who is against net neutrality? The megaproviders like Comcast and Verizon—Chairman Pai’s old employer—can benefit financially from giving advantage to selected websites. Chairman Pai’s record is that if there is a choice between consumers and big corporations, corporations win.

Let’s look at what the Chairman did recently to allow the biggest broadcast company in America to become even bigger. Congress has put into law a limit on the market share that ultra-high frequency or UHF stations can own, and that limit is 39 percent. The Commission had considered that Sinclair Broadcast Group, the largest broadcast company, holds a 38 percent market share. But Sinclair wants to expand its reach and merge with another big company, Tribune Media. The \$3.9 billion deal would give Sinclair control over 200 more local television stations and expand its market to 72 percent of the television-owning households. Here is a chart that shows how expansive Sinclair’s proposed takeover would be. You can see here the current marks, and you can see down below the proportional footprint.

Traditionally, the FCC has interpreted its rules to prohibit Sinclair from making that deal, but Chairman Pai authored an order in April reinterpreting FCC policy to allow Sinclair to grab almost three-quarters of the market, and Sinclair happens to be well known for its friendly coverage of President Trump. It even requires local broadcast outlets to regularly carry national commentary from a former Trump campaign and White House media surrogate, and its executives have been complimentary of Chairman Pai personally.

Congress intended for there to be a multiplicity and diversity of voices and opinions on the airwaves. Congress explicitly wants to prevent one media organization from having an outsized influence over the Nation.

I have strong reservations about Chairman Pai’s leadership and values. Free speech, media ownership rules, and net neutrality are essential to a healthy democracy, and the Chairman is equivocating or moving backward on all fronts. For these reasons, I oppose this nomination.

Nevertheless, if he is confirmed, I hope we can find common ground and work together. One area where we could do that is rural and Tribal broadband in the West. In my home State of New Mexico, rural areas, pueblos, and Tribes do not have access to the internet that is anywhere near adequate. Approximately 63 percent of people living on Tribal land lack access to acceptable fixed broadband speeds, compared to only 17 percent of the U.S. population as a whole. The gap is even higher for residents of Tribal lands in rural areas, with approximately 85 percent of Tribal people lacking access.

We all know that in today’s world, broadband internet is essential to virtually all successful economic and commercial activity. It is essential to everyday life in America. As a member of the Commerce Committee, I will continue to push the FCC to do all it can to close the digital divide.

Broadband expansion is not a question of political ideology; it is a question of political will. The Federal Government played a big role in expanding electricity and telephone service to every American. We, as a country, have made major investments. We must do the same for rural broadband. Senate Democrats have made a number of concrete proposals recently. I hope we can work with our Republican colleagues on these. I urge Chairman Pai to take them seriously.

Members of the Commission must be 100 percent committed to principles of free speech, to protecting consumers and the underserved. Mr. Pai’s record does not give me sufficient confidence that he shares that commitment, and, therefore, I urge all of my colleagues to reject his nomination.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. CAPITO. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LAS VEGAS MASS SHOOTING

Mrs. CAPITO. Madam President, I come here today to talk about the nomination of FCC Chairman Ajit Pai, but before I begin, I think all of us have incredibly heavy hearts in our homes, in our States, in the country, and in the world, as the horrifying events of Las Vegas really begin to sink in.

I just saw an article come across the news line in my home State of West Virginia with one of the first identifications of the victims. Her name was Denise Burditus. She is from Martinsburg, WV. She and her husband Tony were at the concert together. They have been married 32 years. They were high school sweethearts and were there vacationing and at the concert. Tony wrote on his Facebook page that his wife died in his arms. So we have lost a mother of two, and soon to be a grandmother of five, to this horrible tragedy. My heart sinks for them and for everyone. I really don’t have the words to say to comfort or explain or understand, except that I feel deeply sad and sorry, and I pray for them and their families.

Today, Madam President, I want to talk about the nomination and reappointment of Ajit Pai as the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission. Chairman Pai has been an important partner in my quest to bring rural America and much of my State online. I was very lucky to meet Chairman Pai several years ago. Without question, he has been a champion.

Without question, high-speed internet access has allowed us to connect with one another on a scale we never could have imagined a decade ago. No other technology has become so critical to our daily lives. It is the backbone for our innovation, competition, and economic growth. From starting a business to digital learning and telemedicine, broadband access is critical to the strength of our economy and our communities. Unfortunately, for all the potential opportunities that broadband can offer, not having access to this important service can create insurmountable barriers.

Better connecting States like mine—West Virginia—through improved broadband has become one of my top priorities. Without this, our rural areas risk being left behind. The digital divide exists in this country, and rural Americans are the ones who are on the wrong side of the divide. Small communities and businesses across West Virginia and elsewhere in rural America lack this fundamental infrastructure.

No one understands these issues more than Ajit Pai. Chairman Pai grew up in rural Kansas. He told me that sometimes when he goes home to visit his parents, he cannot get connected in his own hometown. He knows the challenges facing rural communities.

I have had the pleasure of hosting Chairman Pai and his staff multiple times in West Virginia. Most recently, Chairman Pai came to Wardensville in Hardy County, WV, where we have good connectivity and where we have actually been able to create new businesses and opportunities for a small town such as Wardensville. Following our visit, we traveled just 20, 30 miles over to Hampshire County, where getting high-speed internet has been far more challenging. There, Chairman Pai met Eric Hott of Kirby, WV, who has a small chocolate business. Eric is having trouble following up with orders and attracting new customers because he can't get consistent broadband access.

Last August, I held a roundtable discussion with Chairman Pai in Fayette County, WV, focusing on the digital divide and the impacts on tourism. We visited Adventures on the Gorge. I even convinced him to join me on a bridge walk across the beautiful New River Gorge. This outdoor recreation destination is one of West Virginia's most beautiful and premier tourist destinations, but the small businesses there are hampered by the lack of connectivity.

We heard firsthand from business owners who can't grow their business because of poor internet connectivity. It is hard to attract a talented workforce to live and visit in these more rural parts of our States. A local restaurant owner shared their difficulty in notifying customers of available tables through their online system. They lost business because of this.

During each of the Chairman's visits, we discussed possible solutions to promote greater access and competition. Chairman Pai is a great listener. He listens to what the issues are, and those include reducing barriers to investment, streamlining the regulatory environment, encouraging public-private partnerships, and ensuring accountability on behalf of the taxpayer.

Following his tour across the country, during which he stopped in West Virginia, Chairman Pai proposed a digital empowerment agenda right down the alley of the issues we just talked about—to grant Americans living in communities of all sizes, from urban cores to smaller, rural towns, with these online opportunities. Chairman Pai's agenda highlighted a variety of specific measures the FCC, Congress, and State and local governments could make to simplify broadband deployment.

Broadband access will be the result of partnerships between private, local, State, and Federal agencies and organizations. We need to have this collaboration to eliminate duplicative and outdated programs so that States like mine can efficiently deliver broadband to our rural communities efficiently and cost-effectively.

By listening to communities like ours—and remember, I said Chairman Pai is a great listener—the Chairman

has built a plan for achieving widespread broadband access that meets the unique demands of our rural communities.

The FCC plays an imperative role in addressing these issues in large and small States, particularly rural States like mine.

In the 21st-century economy, robust telecommunication networks are increasingly important for today's users and the foundation of future innovations.

Under his leadership at the FCC, he has already taken steps toward modernizing the Commission's role and promoting digital empowerment. Since the beginning of his tenure, the Commission has hit the ground running, enacting a broad strategic vision to close the digital divide, to modernize the Commission's rules, promote innovation, protect consumer and public safety, and improve the Commission's daily operations.

Under Chairman Pai's leadership, the Commission has made significant investments to deliver broadband service to underserved and unserved areas of the country. I am confident that rural America will see more progress with his continued leadership, and today I am very proud to support his renomination to the FCC as he ascends and retakes the chairmanship of a very important part of our communications and telecommunications network.

With that, I yield back.

Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. WARREN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LAS VEGAS MASS SHOOTING

Ms. WARREN. Madam President, I wish to begin by offering my condolences to the victims of the massacre in Las Vegas last night and to their loved ones. I am heartsick for the residents of Las Vegas and everyone around the country who woke up to the horrendous news of last night's attack and who is worried sick about whether their family members, friends, and neighbors are OK.

Thoughts and prayers are good, but they are simply not enough. Thoughts and prayers are not enough when more moms and dads will bury their children this week. Thoughts and prayers are not enough when sons and daughters will be forced to grow up without their parents.

Attacks like the one last night have happened all too often in America. Enough is enough. We have to have a conversation about how to stop gun violence in America, and we need to have that conversation right now.

Madam President, I want to take some time to discuss the vote we will be taking shortly on the nomination of

Ajit Pai to serve as the Chair of the Federal Communications Commission, or the FCC.

One thing that last night showed us is the importance of connections. Every day, moms and dads pick up their phones to check in on their kids, students go online to do research on homework assignments, and families sit together to watch the newest hit television show or movie. It is just a fact—media and telecommunications services play a vital role in helping American households connect with their loved ones, communities, and the world around them.

The FCC makes sure those services are available and accessible to all Americans, whether they live in a rural community or in a large city—at least that is what the FCC is supposed to do. There are a lot of powerful companies that want to change that picture, companies that want to change the rules so they can line the pockets of their corporate executives and their wealthy investors. Those powerful companies have launched an all-out assault on every branch of our government with only one goal: to make sure the government works for them and for their buddies. If it leaves everyone else in the dirt, they don't much care.

As powerful companies know, it is good to have friends on the inside, and they have invested a lot of money in making friends. Giant corporations have spent unlimited amounts of money to elect politicians who will promote their views and to flood Congress with lobbyists who will work around the clock to destroy laws and rules that the industry doesn't like and to reshape those laws to suit corporate interests. But electing politicians and inflating Congress with lobbyists isn't enough. Their Republican buddies in Congress can only do so much. Powerful corporations need weak agencies that will not hold them accountable, so they work to fill those agencies with their allies—friends who can undo the rules that giant corporations don't like, friends who will not go after those companies when they throw the rules out the window to make an extra buck.

The FCC is one of the agencies that have been on their hit list for a long time, and now they see their opportunity to execute a corporate takeover of the FCC. They started at the top with Ajit Pai, President Trump's pick to chair the FCC.

Since his appointment as Chair of the FCC, Chairman Pai has worked at breakneck speed to transform the FCC from an agency that works in the public interest to a big business support group.

Chairman Pai started with net neutrality protections—rules that help keep the internet free and open by preventing giant broadband companies from discriminating against certain internet users and turning the internet into another service that caters to those who can pay top dollar. Like his big broadband buddies, Chairman Pai