
REMARKS INTRODUCING
FCC COMMISSIONER AJIT V. PAI
BY
FORMER FCC COMMISSIONER ROBERT M. MCDOWELL
AT THE
MEDIA INSTITUTE “FREEDOM OF SPEECH” GALA

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(AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY)

Thank you, Patrick. And many, many thanks to you, Rick, Susana, Dick Wiley and everyone involved with The Media Institute for all of the excellent work you do in defending free speech and intellectual property rights. And congratulations tonight also to Perry Sook for winning the American Horizon Award.

It is a great honor to be asked to introduce my friend and former colleague, FCC Commissioner Ajit Pai, the recipient of this year’s Freedom of Speech Award. At the outset, I should say that he is far more deserving than the last sitting FCC Commissioner who received this award five years ago.

Patrick has given me only *three minutes* to crystallize the essence of Commissioner Pai – an impossible task. But here we go

Born in Buffalo, New York to Indian immigrants, Ajit was raised almost at the exact geographic center of the United States: Parsons, Kansas. What could be more American!

His deep intellect and stellar scholastic work earned him admission to Harvard University. His Harvard professors apparently *failed* – they failed to dissuade him from his core belief that big government is antithetical to the sovereignty of the individual.

Directly from Harvard, he enrolled at the University of Chicago to pursue his law degree, where he was an editor of the law review – and won the Thomas J. Mulroy Prize. I have no idea what that is, but it sounds impressive.

From 1997 until his 2012 appointment to the FCC by (some irony here) ... President Barack Obama – in his own words, Ajit had a “hard time holding on to a job.” In those 15 years, he served in *all three* branches of government, plus the

private sector. He was a law clerk for a federal judge, an honors trial attorney in the Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice, and then was cherry picked by Verizon to be an associate general counsel.

It was at this point, a tug-of-war ensued: from Verizon it was on to the Senate Judiciary Committee in 2003, then back to the Department of Justice in 2004, and then back to the Senate Judiciary Committee in 2005. Apparently, the legislative and executive branches were fighting over him, pulling him to and fro – probably resulting in two dislocated shoulders, but it also certainly resulted in a *stellar* early career in public service and excellent preparation for his service at the FCC.

Thank goodness that he landed at the FCC’s Office of General Counsel in 2007, which is when I first met him. I was struck instantly by his million watt brain, matching smile and affable demeanor.

During this time, he had the incredible good fortune to: meet Doctor Janine Van Lancker, fall in love, manage to propose to her on a rooftop – without falling off – and marry her. They now have two beautiful children, Alexander and Annabelle. Commissioner Pai would be the first to agree that the best titles he could ever have are “husband” to Janine and “dad” to Alexander and Annabelle.

And as a leading allergist, Janine can give her expert opinion, with a reasonable degree of medical certainty, that: Commissioner Pai is *allergic* to too much regulation and government overreach.

During his service as a commissioner, he has been an energetic watchdog on behalf of free markets and personal liberty. But he also has a terrific sense of humor, as well as an *alarming* depth and breadth of knowledge surrounding the trivia of popular culture. For example, how many other senior government officials do you know would analogize the FCC’s actions to implement the Telephone Consumer Protection Act to ... the *Big Lebowski*? Who else would incorporate a video clip from the TV show *Veep* into an official statement regarding 5G wireless policy? Clearly, Ajit Pai’s imagination – and *courage* – have no limitations.

Tonight, however, we recognize his commitment to the First Amendment and, specifically, the freedom of speech ... and of the *press*. A quick glance at his section of the FCC’s website reveals the priority this outstanding public servant places on the importance of the freedom of expression. Just ask the creators of the “Multi-Market Study of Critical Information Needs” at the FCC about Commissioner Pai’s passion for defending the freedom of the press.

After I left the Commission in May of 2013, the agency launched a quiet initiative to send *government researchers* into *newsrooms* across the country to

extract information from reporters, editors and station owners about how they decide which stories to run. Commissioner Pai exposed this effort in an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* titled “The FCC Wades Into the Newsroom,” warning “[T]he FCC’s queries may be hard for ... broadcasters to ignore. They would be out of business without an FCC license” He went on to say that the effort would “thrust the federal government into newsrooms across the country,” and asked pointedly, “[W]hy does the ... study include newspapers when the FCC has no authority to regulate print media?” His energetic vigilance produced a *bipartisan* outcry resulting in the FCC abandoning its misguided inquiry.

As the son of two journalists, please accept my personal thanks, Commissioner Pai.

Additionally, in a 2014 *Washington Post* op-ed, he exposed the National Science Foundation’s \$1 million plus “Truthy” study to have the government analyze Twitter feeds and such to root out “social pollution,” “social epidemics,” “political smears” and other forms of “misinformation” while also monitoring who is using hashtags such as #Teaparty or #Dems.

“Hmm,” Ajit Pai wrote. “A government-funded initiative is going to ‘assist in the preservation of open debate’ by monitoring social media for ‘subversive propaganda’ and combating what *it* considers to be ‘the diffusion of false and misleading ideas’? The concept seems to have come straight out of a George Orwell novel.”

He concluded by writing, “The federal government has no business spending your hard-earned money on a project to monitor political speech on Twitter. How should it instead have reacted when funding for Truthy was proposed? The proper response wouldn’t have required anywhere near 140 characters. It could have been, and should have been, #absolutelynot.”

Similarly, the Commissioner has used the bully pulpit to call out those who are intolerant towards dissent and, therefore, free speech, on college campuses. All too often, today’s universities are attempting to redefine the freedom of expression to mean: you only have the liberty to express the point of view shared by your professors. Ajit has had the courage to call this what it is: social engineering through censorship. As the dad of a high school junior who will be entering college in 22 months, Commissioner, I thank you!

So, without further ado, please join me in giving a raucous Media Institute thank you to an outstanding public servant, a first-rate intellect and an ardent defender of the freedom of speech, the Honorable Ajit V. (for “Victory”) Pai!