

## FCC Chairman Ajit Pai still identifies himself as a rural American in talk with NTCA

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My friend and colleague Shirley Bloomfield, CEO of NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association, was on hand at a meeting of NTCA in early February and had some keen observations on the event that are worth noting. Ms. Bloomfield was of the opinion that it was a true

treat and honor to have FCC Chairman Ajit Pai join NTCA and its members in New Orleans at the Rural Telecom Industry Meeting and Expo (RTIME). He shared his perspective and priorities for the state of rural broadband in our country and the role that NTCA members play in ensuring forward movement on bridging the digital divide.

Mrs. Bloomfield sat in something of a “fireside chat” with the Chairman and was appreciative of his willingness to engage with the NTCA sector as well as the time he took in advance of coming to the stage to meet with the NTCA board and policy leadership to hear about the positive impact that the FCC’s December order on Universal Service is already having on expanded construction plans.

### IDENTIFYING AS RURAL AMERICAN

“It is hard to believe that it has been nearly five years since the Chairman (then newly sworn in Commissioner) came to an NTCA meeting and shared his heartfelt sentiment of ‘I am a rural American.’ In subsequent actions reflecting a passion for closing the digital divide, he has indeed walked the walk on supporting rural America,” Ms. Bloomfield commented on the occasion.

Chairman Pai shared that “my wish is for all of rural America to close  
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- FCC Chairman Ajit Pai joins NTCA and its members at the Rural Telecom Industry meeting and Expo.

- Pai shares his perspectives and priorities for the state of rural broadband in the U.S.

- Shirley Bloomfield, CEO of NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association, sat in a “fireside chat” with the FCC Chairman.

- FCC’s order on Universal Service is already having impact on expanded construction plans.

- FCC Chairman continuing to walk the walk of supporting rural America after sharing his sentiment of being “a rural American” upon being sworn in as a commissioner.

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the digital divide. I want to make sure rural America is front and center and not in the background during our decision making.”

During the discussion, the chairman and Ms. Bloomfield were able to hit a number of topics – next steps for Universal Service Fund reform, spectrum issues and the importance of spectrum access for rural providers. They also touched base on the accountability mechanism of performance testing. The Chairman responded “There’s a balance we are trying to strike – we want every USF dollar to be spent wisely...but we need to minimize the burden of this regulatory process.” We’re sure that NTCA members appreciate his thoughtful approach.

Chairman Pai also swung by the hotel a tad early so that he could grab a cup of coffee and chat with NTCA’s board of directors and policy leaders prior to speaking to the full membership.

### NTCA MEMBERS ATTEST TO IMPACT OF USF ORDER

“My favorite part of the discussion was NTCA members sharing the positive impact that the FCC’s recent Universal Service Fund order voted through

in December will have on future construction plans as they continue to lead the way on bringing broadband and advanced services to those rural Americans still waiting as well as their ability to continue to upgrade their existing networks to meet growing consumer demand,” Ms. Bloomfield related.

“I was never more proud of the NTCA membership than when they gave the Chairman a standing ovation as he came to the stage and I certainly hope he felt the “love” on how important the continued success of the high-cost USF program is to those who utilize it to build rural networks,” she continued.

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