Securing America's Digital Future: A Vision for Communications Policy at a Crossroads

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I. Where I've Been: Building the Foundation

When I first entered the telecommunications industry, the landscape was undergoing a quiet but powerful transformation. The era of the Baby Bells was ending, and in its place, a new digital age was dawning, marked by the early expansion of fiber infrastructure, the rise of wireless mobility, and the nascent development of technologies that are now integral to American life. My time in the private sector gave me a front-row seat to this technological pivot, offering practical insight into how public policy and industry innovation must align to deliver results.

Later, during my time on Capitol Hill, I had the privilege of working across a wide

spectrum of technology and telecommunications policy issues. I focused on bridging the digital divide in rural America, an issue as much about economic opportunity as it is about dignity. I worked on spectrum allocation strategies to support the explosive growth of 4G LTE, and laid the groundwork for the emergence of 5G and next-generation connectivity.

As Big Tech platforms grew rapidly in power and influence, I grappled with the implications of new technologies, IoT devices, autonomous vehicles, and data-driven services on consumer safety and market fairness. I also confronted some of the most pressing challenges of our time: protecting personal data in an era of Big Data, responding to cyber threats targeting our critical infrastructure, and ensuring spectrum availability for both commercial innovation and national security.

These roles weren't just jobs; they were preparation. They built my belief in the promise of American innovation and also shaped a realism that guides my current work at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Our leadership in global communications is not a birthright. It must be defended, adapted, and constantly renewed.

II. What I've Seen: Progress Worth Celebrating, Warnings Worth Heeding

Over the past decade, the United States has achieved remarkable gains in communications technology. Private investment and smart policy helped propel the rollout of 5G networks, increasing broadband capacity and unlocking new applications in healthcare, manufacturing, and logistics. Satellite broadband has moved from a speculative technology to a viable option for many Americans in remote and underserved regions. Connected vehicles and smart infrastructure are no longer futuristic concepts; they're active parts of our economy.

In short, we've seen the kind of innovation that only free markets and democratic institutions can truly enable.

Despite all the progress, the threats to our communications future are real and mounting. Cyberattacks, like the Salt Typhoon operation, reveal just how vulnerable our critical networks remain. Ransomware and data breaches threaten not just financial loss, but public trust. Infrastructure challenges, from copper theft to undersea cable sabotage, are becoming more than just fringe concerns; they are tangible threats to the resilience of our networks.

Supply chain security has emerged as a new frontier in national defense. Our networks are only as secure as the components that build them. That's why the presence of foreign adversary-backed vendors like Huawei and ZTE in U.S. infrastructure raises red flags beyond economic competition; it's a question of sovereignty and safety.

Meanwhile, on the global stage, we've seen a worrying retreat of U.S. leadership in international spectrum and standards-setting bodies. The World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC-23) should have been an opportunity to project strength and clarity on spectrum policy. Instead, it exposed our need to reassert influence in multilateral forums where the rules of the global digital economy are being written.

Even our GPS systems, so foundational to daily life and national operations, are under threat from spoofing and jamming. These are not abstract or future risks. They're here, now, and demand action.

III. Lessons Learned and a Vision for What's Next

The core lesson I've learned over my years in public service and industry is this: ***our technological leadership is inseparable from the reliability, resilience, and security of our communications networks***. National security today extends far beyond tanks and troops. It is about defending the invisible infrastructure that powers our economy, enables our freedoms, and keeps our people safe.

When adversaries target undersea cables or exploit untrusted equipment in American networks, they're not simply causing disruptions; they're testing our resolve. When they push disinformation through digital platforms or attempt to dominate international telecom bodies, they're challenging the rules-based order that has defined postwar prosperity.

Our response must be multi-pronged and resolute. We must support spectrum policies that allow both commercial growth and public safety missions to thrive. We must ensure the "rip and replace" program, designed to remove untrusted equipment from our networks, gets the funding and urgency it deserves. We must take ORAN (Open Radio Access Network) development seriously to diversify vendors and strengthen supply chains.

At the same time, we can't retreat into protectionism. American leadership means engaging, assertively and skillfully, in global venues. It means shaping the future of artificial intelligence, satellite communications, and quantum networks through democratic values, technical excellence, and policy foresight.

And most importantly, it means building a regulatory culture that doesn't just keep up with innovation but anticipates and supports it.

Another critical dimension of modern communications policy is the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI). Building on recent federal AI initiatives and action plans, the FCC recognizes that the future of AI depends fundamentally on secure, resilient communications infrastructure capable of handling the vast data flows and computational demands that AI requires. Our networks must provide a robust foundation that fosters innovation while safeguarding against misuse and protecting consumer trust.

To achieve this, the regulatory environment must support spectrum policies and network architectures designed to accommodate AI-driven applications. Additionally, collaboration with other federal agencies is essential to secure data and communications pathways integral to AI's safe and responsible deployment. International engagement is also necessary to shape AI standards and governance in ways that reflect U.S. values and strategic interests.

IV. What I Plan to Do at the FCC

As a Commissioner at the FCC, I see our mission as one of stewardship and forward-looking leadership. Working in collaboration with my fellow Commissioners

and the expert staff across the agency, I plan to focus on the following priorities:

- **Spectrum Leadership:** We must ensure that America continues to lead the world in next-generation wireless technologies. That means conducting efficient and forward-looking spectrum auctions, accommodating a variety of users, from mobile broadband to satellite operators to critical government functions, and creating policies that enable experimentation and innovation.
  Reasserting Global Influence: Our presence in international telecommunications organizations like the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) must be revitalized. U.S. representatives should be leading the conversation, shaping the standards, and setting the norms, not watching from the sidelines as adversaries fill the vacuum.
  Enhancing Supply Chain Security: Programs like ORAN development are essential to ensure we're not overly dependent on any one supplier or nation. We need to prioritize transparency, interoperability, and security in every layer of our network supply chains.
  Infrastructure Resilience: From undersea cables to GPS, the physical and digital arteries of our communications networks require more attention and more protection. Whether through improved threat monitoring, public-private coordination, or targeted investment, we must shore up these critical assets.
  GPS Integrity and Critical Timing Infrastructure: The FCC should continue to work closely with other agencies to monitor, deter, and prevent GPS interference. Backup systems and more robust authentication technologies will be vital in an age where timing is everything, from financial transactions to energy grids to emergency response.
  Supporting AI-Ready Infrastructure: In alignment with national AI strategies, the FCC will prioritize policies that enable networks capable of supporting growth and development in AI technologies. This includes ensuring sufficient spectrum availability, encouraging the deployment of robust broadband networks everywhere they are needed, and partnering with federal and private stakeholders to secure the data and communications infrastructure integral to AI's safe and responsible use.

V. Conclusion: The Stakes Are National, And Generational

America's communications infrastructure is the silent engine behind our global leadership. It empowers our economy, defends our security, and connects our people. But like any engine, it requires maintenance, foresight, and the occasional overhaul.

At this inflection point, we cannot afford complacency. We must act with the urgency of innovators and the discipline of stewards. That means reinforcing our networks against tomorrow's threats while unlocking the possibilities of technologies not yet imagined. It means reaffirming our presence on the world stage, defending our

values, and ensuring that the free and open model of the internet doesn't yield to centralized control or authoritarian ambition.

I believe deeply in the promise of American innovation, and in the role smart policy can play to unleash it. The path forward is not easy, but it is clear: lead in spectrum, secure our infrastructure, outpace our adversaries, and do it all with the confidence that comes from a free people driving progress through ideas, not fear.

With these priorities, and with the continued collaboration of public servants, industry leaders, and civil society, I believe we can build not only a stronger communications framework but a more secure and prosperous future for generations.

This moment matters. The decisions we make today will affect not only the strength of our country now, but the shape of our society for decades to come.

Olivia Britt Trusty serves as an FCC Commissioner.