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THE FUTURE OF COMMUNICATIONS REGULATION
WITH FCC COMMISSIONER OLIVIA TRUSTY

Washington, D.C.

Wednesday, February 4, 2026

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OPENING REMARKS:

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FIRESIDE CHAT:

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REYNOLDS: Good afternoon. My name is Molly Reynolds, and I am the vice president and director of the Governance Studies program here at Brookings. The Governance Studies program focuses on strengthening America's democratic institutions and democratic processes. We are the proud home of the Center for Technology Innovation, which delivers research that affects public debate and policymaking in the arena of US and global technology innovation, which includes work on topics ranging from the digital divide to artificial intelligence.

Ensuring effective technology governance has long been a key area of focus for CTI and the Federal Communications Commission as the regulator for the nation's communications infrastructure. Home to a variety of programs that are critical for connectivity and a driver of the US' role in global technology leadership is a central player in that ecosystem.

Today we are very pleased to welcome one of the FCC's commissioners, Olivia Trusty, to Brookings to discuss what the agency is prioritizing, alongside Senior Fellow and CTI Director Nicol Turner Lee. Commissioner Trusty was nominated by President Trump to the FCC in January 2025 and confirmed by the Senate in June 2025. She's one of three leaders on the current commission alongside Chair Brendan Carr and Commissioner Anna Gomez. I'm so pleased to welcome both the Commissioner and Nicol to the stage for a fireside chat.

LEE: Thank you first of all. Thank you, Molly, for that great introduction. Can we have Molly a round of applause? That's my boss. I wanna make sure we all know that. And Commissioner Trusty, thank you for coming.

TRUSTY: Thank you for having me.

LEE: I'm sure at the end of this conversation you'll still be thankful that you came. For all of you here, as it was mentioned, I'm Dr. Nicol Turner Lee, I'm excited about this conversation. The Federal Communications Commission is one of the areas that I have been immersed in for probably the majority of my own career. So, I do know what it means to do a regulatory filing with the FCC. But most importantly, this is a pivotal time to have a conversation on just the state of communications.

There's so many things happening and you have been busy. I actually want to go to your testimony last month.

TRUSTY: Okay.

LEE: Before Congress, and you raised these three points that I think are worth reiterating for the group. And maybe you can go a little bit more in, in detail. You said your priorities as a new commissioner are universal connectivity, network resilience, and US leadership and next generation technologies. Sure. And I found those to be quite bold. But also, quite necessary. But I want you to like detail for the group. What do you mean by that? What do you think you're going to do to expand above those priorities? And like how is that going to look like, what is that gonna look like for the FCC?

TRUSTY: Sure. Thank you again for the opportunity to be here and I appreciate the opportunity to have this conversation. As you mentioned, my priorities are universal connectivity, network resilience, and US leadership and next generation communications technologies. Universal connectivity means connecting all Americans once and for all. When I think about network resilience, it means having a more secure, more reliable and more resilient communications infrastructure. And then as far as US leadership, it means promoting US technologies and standards, not just domestically, but abroad, so that they further our values of trust and security and open and free markets. So, in my now seven months at the commission.

I've certainly learned a lot about how to go about tackling each of those issues. And I feel like my issues or my priorities have expanded as I've learned more about the challenges, the regulatory barriers and the opportunities. That providers face in the communications marketplace. But as you mentioned, beyond those three things, there are several other issues before the commission, including making sure we have a dynamic, vibrant and competitive media ecosystem that supports local news. So, I'm sure we'll touch on that later, but there's so many things happening before the commission. I'm so grateful and honored by President Trump for nominating me to be at the commission during a really important time for this industry.

LEE: And it's so interesting too, since you've been there, there's been a lot of talk of the modernization of the agency as well. I know there's several proceedings to look at some of the burdensome statutes that may be there and rules. How do you find yourself navigating through that with your new priorities in seven months?

TRUSTY: Yeah, absolutely. I really have to commend Chairman Carr for his leadership in initiating what he calls the delete proceedings following President Trump's direction to unleash prosperity through deregulation and deliver great results for the American people. And so along those lines, and delete, delete, delete, we've been focused on eliminating outdated, unnecessary, and unworkable rules so that we create a regulatory environment that fosters greater investment, innovation and competition. All of those things are foundational to our ability to achieve universal connectivity, to enhance network resilience and to promote US leadership in next generation communications technologies.

LEE: And that's gonna be important I think, also for consumer protection, don't you think? In terms...

TRUSTY: Oh, absolutely.

LEE: What actually are the burdens to that?

TRUSTY: Absolutely.

LEE: Yeah. That leads me to my second question, obviously. I think most of I wrote a book about this in terms of the digital divide. It's 20% off, by the way, in the hall. You just have to make sure the inventory goes low in the bookstore. But Universal connectivity and the Universal Service Fund are under debate right now, and I think that's always been a lever for ensuring that we can get to universal connectivity, particularly on the affordability side. And there's no question that people are struggling on the affordability when it comes to groceries. We don't want them to continue to struggle when it comes to broadband. Talk to me a little bit about how you're gonna ensure that the Universal Service Fund still remains an impetus for us to really get to the universal connectivity goals that you are espousing.

TRUSTY: Absolutely. Universal connectivity, universal service, that is the cornerstone of the FCC's mission and millions of Americans have been connected thanks to the Universal Service Fund. But the future of the program, as many of is somewhat uncertain as the contribution base continues to shrink. Fortunately, Congress has set up a congressional bipartisan bicameral USF working group where it is actively exploring reforms or ways to modernize. The program to ensure its long-term viability and sustainability. In some of my earlier travels in these past seven months, I've had the opportunity to meet with providers who've talked about the importance of USF, providing ongoing support for the operation and maintenance of networks in rural and remote areas.

And I think that's an important topic of discussion that the working group is tackling. But, as we look ahead, we know that we're gonna need certain reforms right? To the program. That's right. To address contribution reform, to make sure it is predictable, specific, sufficient to continue meeting connectivity needs across the country. I think a part of that discussion should include how do we eliminate duplicative spending in areas so we're not funding multiple providers to serve the same area so that we're better stewards of taxpayer dollars and we're targeting resources to unserved areas. And then as we think about a low-income program, I think that too, we need to focus on targeting it to Americans in need.

You talk about affordability. It's an important program for that. We did have an unfortunate IG report that showed that there continues to be some fraud, waste, and abuse in our existing low-income program. So, I think those types of issues will need to be addressed but also talking about how to address affordability challenges in the program going forward.

LEE: And that's interesting that you say that. I think we had some great lessons too from last year, particularly with the affordable connectivity program, that affordability was such a big indicator as to whether or not people were gonna choose between broadband and bread. So hopefully we'll take that evidence, and I know we're gonna do some of that work here at Brookings to just make sure we're coming in and saying, this is why we're addressing this because it actually leads to some, an Onramp for so many other things.

TRUSTY: Absolutely. Absolutely. The one thing I'll mention is the good news is. Prices are coming down when you look at broadband. So, home broadband prices are down three to 4%. And when you look at wireless services, those are also down by 18% over the last decade according to CPI data. So, there's more work we can do to build on top of those gains, but I absolutely take

LEE: Yeah, no, I appreciate the fact that we're coming to the table, 'cause I think that's gonna be a critical move. I forgot to say this earlier, but if you had questions that you would like to ask of the commissioner, there were index cards that were available on your way in, write your question down and if you have a question, raise it up. They told me at any time, it's not gonna be a distraction to us. Oh, I'll let you know if it is. If there's too many index cards. And we will do our best to answer those questions at the end of the discussion. I'll come back to universal connectivity in a moment, but I do wanna talk about the resilience and network resilience. I'm parsing this by your three goals, right? Tell us what that means and how that applies to spectrum availability, security measures. I just think there's some kind of hearing, I think today or tomorrow on FirstNet. Oh, sure. So, there is a lot of network resilient conversation that's going on but give me a little bit. Of insight into what you're thinking of policy wise.

TRUSTY: Sure. There, there are a number of things to talk about on spectrum and network resilience. So let me start with spectrum as it relates to resilience and removing outdated regulations. So, what this is helping us to do is create a regulatory environment that's more flexible, more innovation friendly, and more efficient. And by creating this kind of environment, we're able to support the development of modern wireless services and technologies. We're able to promote competition and meet evolving consumer demands. Of course, all of this is aided by the fact that we have our general spectrum auction authority restored, and yes, and a long-term spectrum pipeline. Thanks again to President Trump for his leadership and for the leadership of Chairman Cruz in the Senate and Chairman Guthrie and Hudson in the house. This is really important for the United States, not just for resiliency, but for US leadership.

LEE: And when you think about that auction authority, do you think that based on the time that we spent without restoring it, that we're gonna be competitive to, other countries that, China has had so

much time to think about C-band and other types of spectrum and now we're on the market again. Are we gonna be behind or are we gonna actually be ready for this?

TRUSTY: I think it gives us a great foundation to be ready. And I've been a proponent of an all of the above approach to spectrum policy. And I think we're doing things right now to help us catch up and to ultimately lead so we can accommodate a variety of users use cases and technologies. So, at the commission, our immediate priority is developing the rules for the upper C-band spectrum auction. That auction needs to be completed by July 4th, 2027. We also have the AWS s3 spectrum auction that will be initiated in June. And both of those auctions will provide opportunities for licensed spectrum use. But we also need more spectrum for unlicensed uses to support growing demands and WIFI connectivity as well as the internet of things and other applications.

And I would be remiss if I didn't say we need more spectrum for satellite uses as well, given the growing space economy. So, we have a couple of proceedings at the commission, the satellite spectrum abundance proceeding, where we're looking to make upward of 20,000 megahertz available for satellite connectivity and space-based applications. And we're looking at more intensive use of spectrum above the 24 gigahertz band for fixed satellite services. So licensed unlicensed satellite spectrum. All of this is important to support innovation. And again, to your point, to be a leader globally in a variety of technologies and use cases.

LEE: If I could stay on that for a minute. So, when I was thinking about having children, I decided I just wanted two. Because if you add a third, there's not enough food on the table. Because you're gonna have that other child sort of vying for the same resources. Yeah. The last scarcity conversation we had with Spectrum was the government, obviously. Now we've added space. I'm just curious from you, 'cause there's been a lot of talk, maybe we should start going more space versus fiber. Do you see that it's gonna be somewhat of an even distribution of these three connectivity, channels? 'cause I think for me, as long as we get tech connectivity to people in a tech agnostic way, But we also respect the fact that we still need to propagate in ways that make sense overall. I'm just curious. 'cause now we've added space to the table. That's like my third child that I never had. Because now you have to consider what those implications are.

TRUSTY: Sure. Great question. And I love the analogy to children. I didn't think of it about it that way, but yes. To answer your question, we're gonna need to find a way to accommodate a variety of users and use cases as it relates to government agencies. I think the Working Families Tax Cut Act, also known as the One Big Beautiful Bill, did a really great job in repurposing spectrum for commercial use, while also protecting the spectrum equities of federal users. And I think to build on that success we need to continue engaging in interagency coordination as it relates to spectrum management matters. And then we need to explore capabilities like integrated sensing and communications where the same network carrying our data and communications traffic can also detect objects, measure distances, provide situational awareness and other sensing capabilities that federal users rely upon. It may also require artificial intelligence. These are things we need to continue investing in, continue exploring so that we can accommodate these growing bandwidth needs on both the federal and the non-federal side.

LEE: Yeah, 'cause it just seems to me there's gonna be. Many years ago, we tried to reduce the crowdedness of the marketplace. Sure. Even when you on Capitol Hill, you remember that, and now we might be adding a bit more crowdedness. Particularly now that you added that two words, ai that has consumed conversations. I wanna stay on the spectrum piece and talk about WIFI seven. Tell me more about that. You had mentioned a little bit of that in your hearing, and I know many of us are curious to see what does that mean?

TRUSTY: Yes. WIFI seven is just the latest WIFI technology standard. It will provide, or it does provide faster speeds, lower latency improved reliability and performance. And it's on the marketplace right now in certain routers smartphones, laptops and other devices. And it promises to support emerging and innovative use cases with respect to augmented and virtual reality smart factories and more. So, I think it's a really great example of US leadership and technological innovation, something that we can be promoting more domestically as well as abroad.

LEE: And that also lends itself, I think, to the conversation of the cable providers and the wireless providers, which over the years, I hate to date myself, in many cases, have become one or two companies that are doing both.

TRUSTY: Yeah.

LEE: How do you see the balance between the two industries as well as we think about spectrum allocation, and I promise this is my last spectrum. Because look, I know some of you, I love talking about spectrum, believe it or not. I don't write a lot about it because it's hard to just write about spectrum, but I think it's why we have you here. It's so interesting to hear how we're evolving in this space.

TRUSTY: Absolutely. I love talking about spectrum too. It's the lifeblood...

LEE: oh, good. So, we can actually be together and talk about spectrum. So, everybody else, we're just gonna talk about spectrum for another hour.

TRUSTY: Yeah, it's, we need spectrum. It's the lifeblood of wireless and WIFI connectivity as it relates to balancing the needs of both licensed, unlicensed users, wireless cable. Again, I would go back to what I said about being a proponent of an all the above approach to spectrum policy. We have the upper C-band spectrum auction. We have AWS three. Just last month we took action at the commission to increase the utility of the six gigahertz band, which will allow for higher-powered, unlicensed devices to operate in that band. And so, I think those types of initiatives can help support growing bandwidth needs. But again, it's about an all of the above approach where everyone can thrive, every entity can thrive in this ecosystem.

LEE: Yeah, no, it makes a lot of sense. And for those of you that follow ai, I think. Our ability to get the infrastructure right on our wireless and wire line modes will actually determine our success in getting ai. like my hypothesis, I wanna go to this conversation you mentioned in terms of C-band and I mentioned China. How does that relate to standard setting? Because now that we're reauthorized to talk about spectrum in a meaningful way. The WRC is gonna matter, the World Radio Congress and all this other stuff. So, I'm just curious, how does that also relate to standard setting?

TRUSTY: Absolutely. This is so important. When you think about the ITU broadly and the WRC specifically, the conferences coming up in 2027, and, I think the spectrum provisions in the Working Families Tax Cut Act provide a great foundation for us to develop a unified strategy going into this

next conference where we're able to focus on key US interests and priorities and work with our international allies in advance to preempt those who are seeking to undermine US interests and Western values. So, what does that mean between now and next year when the conference occurs? It means that the public sector and the private sector need to work together to align priorities that work is already ongoing. It also means that we should be engaging in pre-WRC coordination with our international allies so that our preferred standards and technologies achieve harmonization and scale.

We wanna build coalitions around that. And it means working with Congress so that we have the resources to support both our technical and diplomatic representation needs. Going into the conference, these conferences are foundational to our ability to promote American values, our economic competitiveness, and our national security. So again, having some congressional backing with these spectrum provisions I think is really important to emerging from this conference with wins. I'll note at the last WRC, we didn't have auction authority. We didn't have a spectrum pipeline, and we really weren't unified on a US position. And that really, I think, set us back in terms of sidelining us on some pretty important conversations. My hope is that this time around, given that we do have the things I just mentioned, that will be much better positioned to emerge with wins.

LEE: And just a little tag on question. Congress has been a little busy with a whole lot of other stuff, right? And so, I'm curious from you, do you think that we'll get Congress's attention to even look at stuff like this? 'Cause I think this is, for me, the agency is such a leader in this space of universal connectivity and global connectivity. There are so many other issues that are taking the attention of Congress right now. What do you think we'll talk, will they emerge and be able to look at this in a way that's meaningful to this part of our communications conversation?

TRUSTY: Absolutely. At the FCC oversight hearing we had in the Senate in December, as well as the oversight hearing we just had in the house, this came up a handful of times from members on both sides of the aisle. And so, I think it's top of mind for a lot of members because they understand the importance of this conference in terms of defining some of our economic and national security objectives.

LEE: Yeah. I'm just trying to get them to break through Brendan Carr and Jimmy Kimmel so they could talk a little bit more about spectrum. You and me both, because it seems like this is really important. One other thing that you said in the hearing, and it actually strikes personal for me is this idea of foreign adversaries.

TRUSTY: Yeah.

LEE: And I wanna sit here for a minute. How many of you in this room have found yourself just bombarded by robocall that are things like, Hey. Some people know what I'm talking about. You look at it for a minute, you're like, do I know this person? Should I say something? And then you find out, if you say, Hey, the next thing is some kind of like extortion text that's coming, or we're getting these robocalls. I don't know about all of you, but I think every day I'm offered about a hundred thousand dollars through some type of robocall. This is getting outta hand. And I'm curious from you, how can the FCC sort of reign this in? Because it's not just robocalls from before that is using our numeric, our numbering indices. Now it's ai. Yeah. And in many instances these are happening offshore. So just would love to I heard that in your voice when you were like, this is really important to me and I think it's gonna be important to me and my mother, and so many other people of that are vulnerable to this.

TRUSTY: Thank you for raising this. And you're right, this is so important. This is the top consumer complaint at the FCC, and I appreciate you raising seniors too, because they're so vulnerable and bad actors are preying on these individuals, which is just so wrong. But at the commission we are working to try to address this. And I, and this is, I think, a priority for everybody at the commission since I've been there. We've made efforts to remove providers from the robocall mitigation database for failing to proactively combat illegal robocalls and implement call authentication protocols. Protocols that are important to legitimate the verifying the legitimacy of a caller.

We have adopted a notice of proposed rulemaking as it relates to originating providers to include more caller identification information in the call so that the end user, the consumer knows more about who is actually calling. And we're making efforts to push through the IP transition, which will allow for the full implementation of call authentication protocols. You mentioned artificial intelligence, and I worry about the increasing sophistication of these illegal robocallers, but I also see AI as a potential

tool for good actors in this space to leverage, to detect fraud and scams to better protect consumers in the end user in this ecosystem.

And so, it's something that is very much top of mind for us at the commission. I know that there have been additional legislative proposals to do more interagency work as well as work with our international counterparts to try to track bad actors that originate from overseas. But it's something that we are continuing to work on.

LEE: Yeah, no, I saw a recent letter, I think it was from Congress that had the DOJ, the Department of Justice, the Federal Trade Commission. I think it was one of agency, but it wasn't the FCC. And I was like, wait a minute. A lot of the work that the FCC has done has been on robocall technology, so it seems like it's just a necessary add on to the agency. So happy to hear that. Will the FCC look at education? One part of this is how do you educate people, which is the agency's role on what this is, and maybe doing announcements and service calls. Don't pick up this thing if you don't know this person, don't trust it. It's like that ad council feel.

TRUSTY: Absolutely. So, our consumer and governmental affairs bureau, they're the heroes of the agency when it comes to consumer education as well as education for providers so that they know how and when to track illegal robocallers. So that work continues. They're doing terrific work across the country to educate consumers about how best to protect themselves. And we're coordinating with the FTC, of course, as they have a consumer protection role to protect people from these bad actors and illegal robocallers in the marketplace.

LEE: Yeah. I once heard from somebody, I think that somebody could use this. A person tell me the best way when you are in the situation, particularly for your elder parent or family member, is to come up with a story that only you and them know. So, when you get a call and you say, what happened to me when I was six years old? And if you have that story, it kind of filters through somebody not knowing that part of your life. I haven't tried that yet. I think partly 'cause I can't remember what happened to me when I was six years old. 'cause I'm beyond, way beyond that point. But I think that, just some common sense, reminders could also help, make this less complicated for people.

TRUSTY: Absolutely.

LEE: So good to hear about that now. I'm putting these questions in. Again, if you have questions for our honorable commissioner, please put them on your index cards. We will collect them and we'll get to as many as possible. I wanna switch to rural. Yeah. And I switched that because you came from Mississippi.

TRUSTY: Yes.

LEE: What part of Mississippi?

TRUSTY: So, I worked for Senator Wicker.

LEE: You were representing Mississippi for quite some time.

TRUSTY: Yes. So, I had the honor and privilege of getting to work for Senator Wicker for eight years. And I got back to Mississippi a number of times, all different parts. Whether it was in the Delta, Jackson down on the coast, everywhere, and great people, great food but we also got an understanding of what their connectivity challenges were. So, it was a really terrific opportunity to work for him and help address those issues.

LEE: So, think about that time when you were there eight years ago, what did connectivity look like for people and how did that relate to like health disparities and other things that were happening in the rural south?

TRUSTY: Sure. Certainly, there were gaps. About a month after I was sworn in, we had the opportunity to go back to Jackson, Mississippi and visit the University of Mississippi Medical Center, and we saw how this center was leveraging. Broadband connectivity to deliver telemedicine and telehealth services to Mississippians across the state. And it just underscored the importance of having a high speed, reliable connection to provide affordable and quality healthcare services to individuals in rural communities who may face doctor shortages. So, it was a very rewarding

experience. One to go there a month after I was sworn in, but just to see how much progress had been made since I started working for Senator Wicker a long time ago.

LEE: And the FCC, some people may not know, this actually carries a lot of weight when it comes to connectivity in rural hospitals. That's one of the signature programs under the Universal Service Fund, right? Where are we with that? Are we going to see a lot more money going to rural hospitals? Rural healthcare? Obviously we have to. Solve the rural broadband challenge. But I think healthcare, along with affordability, are two areas in which people mostly struggle.

TRUSTY: Yeah. Great. Great question. At the commission we have the rural healthcare program, which is a part of the Universal Service Fund. And high level it provides or ensures that rural patients have access to modern healthcare services, including telehealth. So, in recent months at the commission, we've made certain process improvements to ensure that funding in this program aligns with demand. We've also extended the application deadline for eligible entities to have additional access to this funding. And we've rolled over unused funds to increase. The amount of resources available for the 2025 funding year. All of those things I think are helping to meet the needs of rural communities across this country. Thanks to the congressional, bipartisan bicameral working group, I think that's another opportunity to explore potential reforms or ways to modernize the program, other process improvements to meet the need.

LEE: And will that happen soon or later? It'll happen as soon as I believe is possible. No, I'm asking 'cause those, I think that's gonna be so critical for people. Yeah. I mean with health declining among, excuse me, the population, rural health community, rural communities are really facing a lot of disparities.

TRUSTY: Absolutely. The chairman, as sets the agenda and so that will dictate the timing of this. But it is top of mind for me. I know for him and Commissioner Gomez, in terms of reaching all Americans under the Build America agenda, that's all about promoting high speed infrastructure builds everywhere. And so as long as we can do that as quickly and efficiently as possible, I think these types of opportunities will be made available to rural communities.

LEE: Perfect. Now you mentioned Commissioner Gomez. Yes. How many people on the commission now?

TRUSTY: There are three,

LEE: three making these big decisions. How's it going with Commissioner Gomez? You wanna give us any tea?

TRUSTY: She is so wonderful. She's so nice and it's such a pleasure to get to work with her. I've orbited her circle for the last couple of years. Yeah. And so, it's nice to have the opportunity to work with her. And I'm right down the hall from her.

LEE: Yeah, it's so interesting to watch the three of you testify. And I think it's good they always put you at the end because you're able to come in and here's what I wanna say. Now Commissioner Gomez did testify, and I think this is an area that I personally have been involved in for the course of my career in telecom multilingual emergency alerts. We just got over like one of the worst snowstorms in the East coast. We call, I call it Snowmageddon. And it was just really just, I think we're finding that people have died during the snowstorm. This is an occurrence that we have that require emergency alert alerts in some way or form, whether it's common seek shelter, someone is coming to dig you out, we've seen this across the country. I'm just curious from you what's been the holdup on making these multilingual? Because in my time at different organizations, just making sure that everybody could access them was so important.

TRUSTY: Sure, Great question. Under the previous administration, the FCC adopted an order on multilingual emergency alerts. And I think as a general matter, it's common for certain orders to be paused to reevaluate them in the waning when they've been adopted in the waning days of an administration. But now it's been posted in the federal register and there's somewhat of a lengthy implementation timeline because of so many languages and different smartphone configurations that we have to deal with. But be that as it may, one thing that Chairman Carr did mention at our house oversight hearing was that alert originators can make these alerts available right now, and they could

before this order was adopted. It's just that this order will help. Further ensure that everyone, regardless of the language they speak, has access to safety information during disasters.

I will say beyond the multilingual emergency alerts, we are doing a top to bottom review of our emergency alert system more broadly so that we can explore potential reforms or ways to make available. Timely safety information to Americans that could be potentially lifesaving, right? That's right. We're also doing a modernization of our disaster information reporting system to help restore access to connectivity quickly when disaster strikes. And we are working with providers to better target or better pinpoint callers in buildings with increasing accuracy, wireless callers, so that when they're in harm's way and need help, first responders can get to those individuals as quickly as possible and render aid. And whether it's multilingual emergency alerts, the broader EAS review, the disaster information reporting system or location accuracy, all of these things are geared toward enhancing public safety and saving more lives.

LEE: And how's that tie into FirstNet? Are we gonna see more improvements in FirstNet under this commission?

TRUSTY: So, I will defer to Congress and NTIA and ...

LEE: I know they're working on that right now. I just had to slip that one in there. I've been in this space for 30 years. We started talking about first in a long time ago, and I'm excited that we're talking about it again. But I do think to your point, these emergency alerts are really important that people can get access. Just so many things happening right now. Based on what's happening in the climate. Which leads me to this other area. Of how people get news.

TRUSTY: Yeah.

LEE: Which is media. There's a lot of talk about, just the erosion of localism and media, whether it's print or television. There was a person that was familiar to a lot of people at Congress yesterday talking about. Media in this case, some acquisitions don't necessarily need your comment on that. A lot of people have their own, but my question to you is like, how are we gonna go back and restore trust in the media? Not going back to that K word that I said with your boss, your colleague at the

commission. I'm curious like what is the FCC going to do to actually make sure that we have a lot more trust?

TRUSTY: Sure. Really great question. There was a Gallup report a couple of months ago that showed trust in the media has reached a new all-time low. It's now at 28%. I think a year ago it was at 31%, and five years ago it was at 40%. So, it's not getting better. But at the commission there is a renewed focus on making sure broadcasters are fulfilling their public interest obligations. And I hope that will help move the needle. But this is a shared responsibility, I think, for everyone in the media ecosystem to do what they can to change perceptions about bias in the media. That's, I think, where it starts. So as far as localism, since you mentioned that, the commission is working to modernize our broadcast regulatory framework and empower broadcasters to compete for viewers for programming and ad revenues and reinvest those resources into their news gathering operations.

Hopefully I with the ability to expand access to local content and communities across the country. And so, we've got a number of proceedings looking at that, whether it's media ownership rules, whether it's the next generation standard for television, also referred to as A TSC 3.0. And we're looking at the relationship between networks and affiliates. And so ultimately the record will inform where we go here. But this is another big issue that's before the commission, and we're having active conversations about where to go from here.

LEE: And I just, I wanna follow up on the bias thing that you brought up. Part of my reading of what happened yesterday in the hearing on the potential merger was this conversation on political bias or ideological bias. Years ago, and I'm trying to say maybe I was 12 at this time, but I wasn't Michael Powell and so many other people, the Aspen Institute, we did a whole inventory of what made for a healthy media ecosystem. And one of the things that came in that report, some of you might remember this was like in the. Two thousands, early two thousands. If you don't look it up, there was this report done by the Knight Foundation.

It was a Knight Commission on healthy media. We didn't really talk about bias. We actually flipped it to say it should be a place for so many different voices. How do we move back into that conversation? 'Cause when I look at it as an observer, it appears that maybe we're getting caught up in areas when

localism is about being able to see your local news. I like to look at my local news because it tells me what garage sales and when restaurant week is coming and all this other stuff. But it also alerts me to national issues of concern, but at the end of the day, I have to make my own interpretation of what they are. How do we get back to a healthier ecosystem where it's not as divisive as it is?

TRUSTY: Sure. That's the six...

LEE: I know that's a hard question. I know, and maybe you're not the right person sitting in that chair for me to ask that question, but I'm just curious like that, the FCC plays lots, a major role in that.

TRUSTY: Sure. I think from the FCC's vantage point, it's about public interest and in the statute it talks about how localism is competition, localism, viewpoint diversity and meeting the public interest, airing programming that's responsive to the needs of communities that the broadcasters serve. The chairman has said this before, that the commission does not have a roving mandate to police speech, but we do have a responsibility. Under the statute to make sure broadcasters are fulfilling their public interest obligations. Part of that includes don't engage in broadcast hoaxes. We have the equal time opportunity rule. Public notice was recently put out about that. Don't distort the news. And all of that is based on facts in the record. FCC if there's a preceding before us, it's based on facts in the record, FCC precedent and the law itself with the First Amendment, of course, as our North star guidepost in that effort.

LEE: Yeah, I think it's an interesting area, right? And I think it's a reset of the clock. We've had your colleague Commissioner Gomez on, and I think it's an interesting space to have that conversation now, particularly since people get news from so many different places. We could pick that up if we have time or through questions. Ai. I was trying not to get to it at any point in this conversation. Okay. But the commission has to talk about it, right?

TRUSTY: Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

LEE: I'm curious to see, in terms of your own priorities where do you see AI in all of this? Do you see it as something that the commission has to take it on as a new advisory? Is it something that. How is the commission thinking about the role of AI in our modern communication system?

TRUSTY: Sure. I think ai will be the most transformative technology of our time. And there's several benefits for the communication sector, but also consumers more broadly. I think about what it means for us consumers for hyper-personalized experiences instant 24 7 support, increased convenience and so many other things. For the communication sector, I think it means spectrum efficiency, it means detecting fraud and scams as we talked about with illegal robocall. It means network security, network optimization, probably some customer service applications. Although I do not like talking to the chat bots when...

LEE: I got, oh, I know, I tried to talk to a chatbot to get an oil change the other day, and I said, they said, what time would you like to come in, morning or afternoon? I said, no evening. And then she went silent. And I had to call back and get a person. Yeah. Because that wasn't part of the selection. Yeah. So not my preference.

TRUSTY: Be that as it may, I think the opportunities are boundless and I think where the commission is focused is on supporting President Trump's efforts to create a national policy framework for artificial intelligence within our statutory authority. I think such a framework will provide predictability and certainty for innovators. It will reduce compliance costs and promote innovation and investment, all of which will make sure this technology is more accessible to consumers. And along those lines that the commission. We are focused on, we have a notice of inquiry where we've asked a couple of questions about whether there are any state, a law AI laws that interfere with our ability to carry out our authorities and obligations under the Communications Act.

And I anticipate there will be another proceeding initiated from the executive order on artificial intelligence where we need to explore whether there are federal reporting or disclosure standards for ai. Models to preempt state laws. That's not been initiated yet, but I expect that. But I think the important thing here is having a national policy frame framework so that it remains accessible to everyone everywhere. I think alternatively that a patchwork of state AI laws will create a situation of haves and have nots where you have some states that might take a more prescriptive regulatory approach to AI stifling investment.

Or other states might take a light touch approach to AI that might invite more investment in innovation, which means this technology is more accessible. I will call out, Chairman Guthrie, he had a great essay that captured a number of these issues on artificial intelligence. And I really appreciate him and his advocacy for a national policy framework here, because I think that's important to continued investment in innovation and US leadership. This is the technology that's gonna underpin our economic and national security going forward.

LEE: You know how you opened up that question for me 'cause I have opinion on state moratoriums, so allow me to ask that question back to you. Respectfully. So, I agree with you. That patchwork of state laws is something that we definitely try not to do, in the United States just because the internet is boundless and for the most part, you don't wanna have to have the lack of certainty because of that. AI is interesting 'cause I've noticed just in my research, that the states are regulating around consumer protection for the most part.

Darrell West and I just put out a community benefits paper on data centers, for example. And many of the resistance that's coming up is because people need more information on the narrative or they don't feel like they have agency in Congress to say, Hey, why is this data center coming in my backyard? They wanna talk to their local legislators. So, I'm curious have, has the FCC thought about that? 'cause I see in the AI action plan that the FCC is gonna play a role in also filtering out which ones may be more or less burdensome. To me, it appears that it's not like data privacy.

TRUSTY: Okay.

LEE: Maybe it's almost like what we're seeing with social media, for example. Okay. Where states are exerting some type of agency or trying to arbitrate, what they think are some of the pulse points on ai. So maybe a state saying we wanna make sure. That we have more agency in the zoning of AI data centers. Or maybe a state wants to say, we did a paper on this, that maybe there's an opportunity to push back on this or have more guidance or disclosure. Is that really a bad thing for states to have some kind of public view of that? I'm just curious from you, is that the right way to ask it? But how do we actually like balance that so that we're also in the absence of federal legislation, not, locking down states' rights and their ability to legislate their constituents.

TRUSTY: So great question.

LEE: Yeah I just, I mean, it was a long question too. I'm sorry about it. I'm just like, when you bought it up, I was thinking like the, this is something I keep my eyes open at night on.

TRUSTY: Yeah. I think it's a very thoughtful question and one that a lot of people are thinking about. I generally like to think of states, municipalities as partners in the effort to close the digital divide and make sure these technologies remain accessible to everyone everywhere. And so, I think in this current proceeding that we have this notice of inquiry where we're asking different questions, we'll certainly get comments like that and that will further inform what the FCC should do going forward. And then with this other potential proceeding that the chairman would likely have to bring up in, in response to the executive order on ai, I imagine that we'll get even more commentary on that topic because I think it's one that we, that needs to be resolved so that. We have certainty, we have predictability. People, consumers want to actually consume AI technologies, and we have the leadership position that we're aiming for.

LEE: Yeah. 'cause that ties in and I'm gonna open it up to questions in just a few minutes. If y'all, I didn't forget about you, you're in the room. But that brings up like the digital divide and the AI divide, right? There's part of this conversation. We host an event in December about the future of the internet and the age of ai. There are real concerns that there'll be people left behind simply because they don't have a device that they can access AI enabled tools. How does that become part of your new agenda to actually prioritize universal connectivity? Makes it more difficult.

TRUSTY: Certainly, it, the whole point I think of the FCC is making sure we have universal connectivity to everyone and that's what we're focused on with the Build America agenda. High speed infrastructure builds also boosting the space economy. So, to the extent fiber is not reaching to a particular area because of cost or geography, there is some other form of connectivity that consumers can have access to. So, I think the focus of the commission in terms of Build America, unleashing connectivity to every corner of the country, that's foundational to making sure AI is also available to everyone.

LEE: Yeah, no, it makes so much sense. I fear that we'll have an AI invisible, right? Because they can't get access to just basic connectivity. Alright. I am going to be a little left selfish with my questions and open up to the audience. Okay. I'm not sure if there are questions that I'm supposed to be handed. If you have additional questions, just raise it now. I saw a few people had cards. Oh, okay. We can go back and talk. So how was, what did you eat today? How was today?

TRUSTY: Actually, I wanted to you mentioned network resilience and we talked a little bit about spectrum. So, I wanted to say what we're doing on to address vulnerabilities and security. Yes, please. 'Cause that's something that's really important to me. I care, I had a, the opportunity to. Work on the Senate Armed Services Committee for two and a half years, and I covered the cybersecurity portfolio. And so, it really opened my eyes to the very real sophisticated and persistent threat facing our communications networks. And so, I have to, tip my hat to the chairman again on this and that we've done a number of things under his leadership at the commission to address vulnerabilities in our communications infrastructure. We have a Council on National Security, which I think is a great platform for us to leverage our authorities under the Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Act and to work with our National Security Agency partners to coordinate share information about threats in the ecosystem.

We also have the Operation Clean Carts Initiative at the commission where the commission is working closely with online retailers, e-commerce platforms to remove equipment from that's on the covered list. From those sites, we have adopted the bad labs reporting order, so that means that telecommunication certification bodies that have ties to our foreign adversaries cannot participate in our equipment authorization process, as that is a conduit for unsecured devices to enter the marketplace. We've taken action undersea cables to enhance the security of that critical infrastructure. And we signed a MOU with our five I partners to exchange information about network security and supply chain integrity. And just last month we took action to increase foreign ownership transparency. So, a lot is going on in the national security space to ensure the resilience the security of our communications networks, which is just as important, if not more so when we think about universal connectivity and US leadership across the board.

LEE: No, I appreciate that. In fact, this first question talks a little bit about that in terms of our coordination with some of these foreign bodies. China hosted the annual global G six summit. Or six G Summit last year under the ITU umbrella. How can the US continue to use multilateral institutions to lead?

TRUSTY: Sure. Great question. In many respects, the State Department takes these takes the leadership role in, in these global conferences and coordinates closely with the FCC and NTIA. But I think the way we lead is we have to have a unified US policy and strategy going into these conferences that's number one, and work with our international allies to build coalitions. So again, that our preferred technologies and standards achieve harmonization and scale. I think at the end of the day, what does leadership look like? To me, it looks like international spectrum policy is harmonized with our domestic spectrum policy. It means that US companies maintain access to global markets, and it means that the standards we adopt at these conferences don't disadvantage US companies and further our values in terms of trust and security with respect to infrastructure and free and open markets. I think as we have a great team at the FCC, I know there are great people at NTIA and the State Department in constant coordination about how to make sure our priorities are being advanced overseas and beyond.

LEE: Perfect. Thank you. I have another question. This is on copper theft, wire theft. Which is a big deal. When I started in this, we were trying to remove the copper. Now people are nailing it. First tell people what is going on with copper wire theft, and then what is the FCC doing to curb that?

TRUSTY: Okay. Great question. And this is something that we've been talking a lot about, so I appreciate whoever wrote that because this is a really important issue that is growing. The problem is growing across the country where it's disrupting access to essential services like 9 1 1. And really impacting our ability to have universal connectivity. And network resilience. All of this is foundational to US leadership as well. And yes, it's disrupting access to a number of services and jeopardizing our economic and national security. It's where people are taking copper out of communications networks or towers and reselling it on the black market. There are state laws that are trying to address this problem, but I don't know that they've been sufficient or adequate in getting at the root of it.

The FCC does not have criminal penalty authority here, and I don't know that a regulatory fix would be tremendously effective. I, I think bad actors, just like with robocalls would not really care about that. But what we are trying to promote is for congress to pass legislation that criminalizes copper theft infrastructure vandalism at the federal level. So, I think that would be a more meaningful deterrent in the interim. We can work with providers to help them harden their networks, to make them less susceptible to these types of attacks. We can also work with law enforcement to bring greater attention and visibility to these issues so that they can go after bad actors and we can work with consumers to help them transition to networks technologies and services that may be less susceptible to these types of attacks. But really important issue that you've raised. And we continue to work with industry and members of Congress to see what more the federal government can do to protect consumers and protect our communities from these bad actors.

LEE: Perfect. Now I'm gonna try to combine these two questions on satellite.

TRUSTY: Okay.

LEE: The challenge with you all write these down is that I can't read your writing. So, I'm gonna do my best to put these into a more paraphrased question. Okay. These questions around the international coordination around, different satellite proposals like SpaceX, 1 million satellite system. How do we coordinate that with China's plans for their satellite system? Is the FCC gonna play a role? And then this particular question on satellite is basically looking at the same thing. How are we gonna manage Spectrum to ensure that we stay competitive in the marketplace as well?

TRUSTY: Yeah.

LEE: So, I don't know if you can answer both of those the same time 'cause they sound a little bit connected in terms of our global competitors and local.

TRUSTY: Yep. First, let me say, I think the space economy, there's so much opportunity in the space economy for both our economic and national security. And the FCC plays a really important role in creating a regulatory environment that invites investment, innovation and competition.

On the spectrum side of things, I think I mentioned we have two proceedings at the commission, the satellite spectrum abundance proceeding, where we're looking to make upward of 20,000 megahertz available for satellite connectivity and space-based applications. And then we're looking at spectrum above the 24 gigahertz band for fixed satellite services. So, I'm hopeful that those will provide opportunities for additional spectrum use as far as international related issues. Yes. This, the WRC 27, there are a couple of agenda items teed up as it relates to NGOs and GSO. Access to Spectrum United States will be front, right and center on those conversations. That's because they're so important to our economic and national security. We're continuing to work on that front. You're always welcome to come visit us if you have ideas about what more the commission can be doing to support US companies and being and being a leader in this very critical domain.

LEE: Perfect. Now this is an interesting question. I think I'll ask it 'cause I think it's interesting to me too. If the president nominates and the Senate confirms the third Republican commissioner, 'cause you're at three, the President, this person says will, perhaps, I'll put it that way. Surely fire Commissioner Gomez the next day.

TRUSTY: Interesting.

LEE: If the FTC is any indication how this is to you? I don't know. You might have a direct line to the president now. I don't know. But would you call on the president to allow a Commissioner Gomez, the server full said it. Confirmed term, and I'll just add my own. Swing to this, is it proper just to have a balanced commission? In terms of do we want a commission that's just all Republicans, or do you see value in having commissioners that are not necessarily the same party? It's a hard question. I know it's a loaded question, but I wanted to ask it.

TRUSTY: I don't, I don't answer hypothetical questions...

LEE: Exactly.

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TRUSTY: I don't speculate on things that haven't happened, that would just get me in trouble. I'll defer to the president on the oversight and management of nominees. My job, and I made this commitment at my confirmation hearing and to others who have asked similar questions, is I'm gonna work with everyone and anyone at the commission to forward the agenda and the mission, the statutory mission of the agency, which is to connect all Americans. And I'm singularly focused on doing just that in the time I have at the agency. And I welcome the comradery we have at the commission and look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues.

LEE: Yeah, I, thank you for that response and for the person to ask questions. It's a great question to ask. I think the issues you raise today are so important that they actually affect everybody, and you do need balance perspective. I. To get through many of these hard questions that the agency has actually dealt with, and in my experience of working with the FCC over the years, almost 20 years. It's always been a balanced commission in some way or form to address all those needs. Yes, I am that old. It's been 20 years and I've known the FCC a question from someone about GPS policy. That's a change what's going on with GPS. Does the FCC expect to address GPS policy this year?

TRUSTY: Yeah. Another great question. So, before I got to the commission had a GPS notice of inquiry. Let me just say first that GPS critical again to our economic and national security, but we know it is vulnerable to disruption and manipulation. So, we're exploring opportunities for compliments to ensure we can collect position, navigation and timing data. So, this NOI is exploring Yeah. Should the FCC have rule changes, should we have test beds, innovation zones public-private partnerships, all to make the GPS system more redundant or more resilient That's right. Against those types of attacks. That's right. And the chairman assess the agenda, but I do hope to see something on GPS this year so that we can ensure, again, the resiliency and the redundancy of this really critical communications platform.

LEE: And if I'm correct, the GPS is not necessarily the internet per se, right? I was corrected one time by a person from the GPS association. I would trust that the most. Yeah, I know I write about in my book, and I'll never forget, I was writing a draft and somebody from GPSA said it's not it's not the GPS that got you lost in rural America. It was the internet. You said you should have been on your GPS

system. So, I always keep that in mind whenever I talk about GPS. Okay. What states are most in need of internet connectivity, if and that is, where are the most geographic gaps right now?

TRUSTY: I had the opportunity to travel to Alaska in...

LEE: Wow. Yes.

TRUSTY: August. And great trip, great people. We had a great host who just showed us, it seemed like every corner of the areas we were in, and we had the opportunity to travel to e Alaska. It's a small tribal village, and they actually had access to connectivity because providers there are doing like, like yeoman's work and getting that connectivity to these. Very rural and remote communities. So, it was great to see how connectivity is helping to transform lives in those areas. But it was also very eye-opening to see how challenging it is to get broadband infrastructure to these communities. Yes. And so fortunately we have things like the Alaska Connect Fund.

LEE: Yes.

TRUSTY: Which I think acknowledges the unique connectivity needs of places like Alaska and the FCC's done work on that fund to make sure we can target resources to those communities. I don't have a list memorized of every state, but I think Alaska is top of mind for me in terms of who needs who has maybe the most gaps when it comes to connectivity, but there's a lot being done from the private sector using federal dollars to close the digital divide in those communities. And it's I think been a real great opportunity for individuals Alaskans to engage in the global digital economy.

LEE: Yeah, I've been to Alaska like yourself. It is a very topic, topographically challenging, right? To be able to bring connectivity, particularly when you go out to the farthest areas. The first experience I had with Alaska was in telemedicine. Oh. When they were providing telemedicine services from Anchorage to some of the more remote islands. And at that time, this had to be about 15 years ago, it dawned on me the importance of doing remote health. Oh, absolutely. For those families. Last question, 'cause we're wrapping up.

TRUSTY: Okay.

LEE: 'Cause I'm not gonna get to all these questions, so I wanna know something about you.

TRUSTY: Okay.

LEE: What do you want your legacy to be? When it's all said and done, like where do you want to people to know the Honorable Commissioner Trusty and what you've been able to accomplish during your tenure at the FCC?

TRUSTY: Sure. First I love public service. I love working with colleagues to advance policies that improve the lives of Americans and access to communication services. I've seen it, it improves lives. We talk about telehealth. It's like that is saving lives and helping people to have a better quality of life. And so, I think, ultimately when history looks back at this chapter of the FCC, I hope that it's defined by results that we've connected more people, that there have been notable improvements in our infrastructure, resiliency, and security. And that the decisions that we're making right now have positioned the United States to lead when we think about six g ai, the space economy, when we think about local broadcasting and beyond. And that's the legacy I hope I, I leave in after the next couple of years.

LEE: Thank you. Please join me and thanking commissioner Trusty for being here at Brookings.

TRUSTY: Thank you.

LEE: Hey, turn me back on. You cannot mute me. I encourage all of you to continue to follow the work of the Center for Technology Innovation. We have recently put out some new reports on data centers. Our second paper came out this week on what community should be asking when actually putting together community benefit agreements. And we have an event in a couple of weeks in that space as well. But our Tech Tank Newsletter podcast continues to share the latest and be explainers for many of the complicated tech policy issues. I'd also encourage you all to follow the FCC. There are open meetings are available to the public, and you can also figure out and understand some of the things that we talked about today, how the commission is actually dealing with them. That was my first foray into policy. Okay. Was sitting down and taking notes at FCC Open Commission meetings.

TRUSTY: How about that?

LEE: I know it wasn't a great job. It wasn't at the time. Now it is because I can understand all the language and all the footnotes, but it wasn't a fun job when I first started. Thank you everybody, and I appreciate you taking your time out with us today.

TRUSTY: Thank you.