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Berry Touts Spectrum STAs During Pandemic

FCC Chief of Staff Matthew Berry yesterday stressed the number of grants of special temporary authority (STA) by the FCC during the COVID-19 pandemic to make spectrum available to a variety of entities.

“Add them all up, and the Commission has so far approved over 230 COVID-19 related STAs. That averages out to more than one-a-day since our first on March 15,” he said in remarks at the 9th Americas Spectrum Management Conference, which was organized by Forum Global and is being held virtually.

“What has been the result? During the pandemic, we’ve been very pleased by the performance of our nation’s wireless networks. For example, according to Ookla, notwithstanding increased demand, in April average mobile broadband download speeds in the United States were actually faster than they were in February, before the pandemic hit, and they’ve gotten faster since,” Mr. Berry said. “I believe that much of this success is due to the policies that we put in place well before the pandemic, market-based policies that encouraged investment in broadband networks and made it easier to deploy infrastructure. But making more spectrum available during the pandemic has also made a positive impact. For example, we’ve seen evidence that our 600 MHz STAs helped T-Mobile double the speed of its 4G LTE service in certain parts of the country.”

In other remarks at the conference yesterday, FCC Chairman Ajit Pai noted the agency’s efforts to make more spectrum, including mid-band frequencies, available.

“The bottom line of all these mid-band efforts is this: With the aforementioned auctions of the C-band, the 3.5 GHz band, and a 2021 auction of the 3.45 GHz band, we are on a path to have a contiguous 530-megahertz swath—from 3.45 to 3.98 GHz—of mid-band spectrum available for 5G,” he said.

For his part, Commissioner Geoffrey Starks stressed, among other things, the need to protect the security of U.S. communications networks.

“I’m glad that the agency has taken steps to identify and remove that equipment, and that Congress has passed supportive legislation. But we have much more work to do,” he said. “Neither the FCC nor Congress has detailed exactly how untrustworthy equipment will be removed and replaced. And Congress has not provided the funding that process requires. Small wireless carriers bought this equipment legally and in good faith. They have now recognized the dangers, and they need our help to address them. Funding delays are creating serious issues for some of these carriers, which face potentially significant expenses with no relief in sight. I am committed to working with Congress to

ensure that sufficient funds are appropriated soon and that a remedy can be provided quickly and responsibly.

“With the needed funding, I’m optimistic that we can make the needed replacements and end up with stronger, more secure networks—and I see Open RAN technology as a part of that solution,” Mr. Starks added. “We need to invest in this technology to enhance our national security and improve our global competitiveness. Using standardized hardware and interoperable interfaces to make our networks more nimble and less vulnerable to the lack of supply chain diversity that has led, at least in part, to our current security predicament. It will also promote American innovation in the development and implementation of this technology. These are exciting possibilities.” —Paul Kirby, paul.kirby@wolterskluwer.com

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