

Sept. 15, 2020

Pai Touts Ligado Order, Infrastructure Streamlining

FCC Chairman Ajit Pai today defended the agency's Ligado Networks LLC order and touted its efforts to streamline the deployment of small cell and other infrastructure.

During remarks at the virtual 2020 Incompas Show, Mr. Pai said he is comfortable with the unanimous order adopted by the Commission in April in the Ligado proceeding (TR Daily, April 20). Approval of Ligado's license modification request allows it to deploy a nationwide broadband network in the L-band. The item drew objections from a slew of federal government agencies, including the Department of Defense; many members of Congress; and aviation and other private-sector entities.

"I'm really proud of the decision that we made," said Mr. Pai, saying that the agency believed the conditions it imposed would ensure critical operations, including GPS, don't experience interference. "We didn't put our finger in the wind, we put our finger on the problem and solved it appropriately."

During another session, Ligado President and Chief Executive Officer Doug Smith called the FCC's decision "in many ways a defining moment for U.S. spectrum policy and innovation."

"It has been a long road, but it was well worth it," Mr. Smith added. "We will protect GPS. There's no question about that, and all of the data supports it. ... They really sorted through all of the, you know, politics and distractions that came along the way and ultimately relied on data and facts."

Mr. Smith also said that "[t]here is so much that Ligado and the DoD can do together."

During Mr. Pai's session, the Chairman also stressed the importance of the public-private partnership that enabled his Keep Americans Connected Pledge and also stressed the advances made in telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Pai also noted that the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit (San Francisco) recently upheld the Commission's 2018 moratoria and one-touch make-ready (OTMR) decisions and largely affirmed its 2018 small cell item, with the exception of a provision concerning aesthetics (TR Daily, Aug. 12).

He also said he was pleased that Incompas and USTelecom proposed a "compromise resolution" to the FCC on competitors' access to unbundled DS0, DS1, and DS3 loops, and operation support systems (OSS), to resolve consideration of those issues in the agency's proceeding on modernizing unbundling and resale requirements in an era of next-generation networks and services (TR Daily, Aug. 6). "I know the issues were difficult," Mr. Pai said.

During another session, Commissioner Geoffrey Starks said “much remains to be done” on the “connectivity stimulus” he called for during the pandemic.

He said the FCC needs to further address the Lifeline program, although he said he is pleased that the agency made enrollment easier, and waive its E-rate rules to ensure that students learning remotely can benefit from support. “E-rate ... needs to expand and meet the moment,” he said.

During another session, Commissioner Brendan Carr, the point person for wireless infrastructure issues at the Commission, also mentioned the Ninth Circuit decision as well as other actions the agency has taken to streamline the deployment of infrastructure. More reforms are needed, he said.

Mr. Carr, who is also the point person on telehealth issues, noted that the FCC is “going to be rolling out another pilot program in the next few months.” He also put in a plug for another issue he has focused on — bolstering the telecom workforce. —Paul Kirby, paul.kirby@wolterskluwer.com

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