

**Remarks of Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate
West Africa ICT Roadmap to Opportunities Conference
La Palm Royal Beach Hotel
Accra, Ghana
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Bon jour et merci pour l'invitation a la conference.

I want to begin by thanking Leocadia Zak, Deputy Director of the U.S. Trade and Development Agency, for the invitation to participate in this conference. This is my first time in Ghana, and it is truly a pleasure to be here in this beautiful setting.

I also want to thank our hosts His Excellency Alhaja Aliu Mahama, Vice President of the Republic of Ghana; Dr. Benjamin Aggrey Ntim, The Honorable Minister of Communications of the Republic of Ghana; and Ambassador David Gross from the U.S. Department of State, for their leadership in bringing together key players from both the public and private sectors of West Africa and the U.S. I also am most pleased we have our friend and your champion in Geneva, Dr. Hamadan Touré of the ITU, which underscores the lasting relationships being made here on our journey to opportunities and action in West Africa.

Last year, I had the opportunity to meet many of you when you were in DC for the U.S.-African Policymaker Dialogue, and I am honored to be here today. Together, we can continue our dialogue and develop partnerships to realize our goals in advancing information and communications technology in West Africa. I embrace and reiterate

Ambassador Gross' words of action and commitment to this region by all of our respective agencies.

I also want to recognize and thank the many U.S. and multi-national companies that are participating in this event. Whether backbone and network providers such as Alcatel, Cisco and Hughes; or software providers such as Microsoft and Oracle; or network engineers and integrators such as IBM and SRA – you all have a critical role to play in advancing communications services throughout Ghana, throughout this region, and throughout the world.

This conference focuses on a “Roadmap to Opportunities” for ICT in West Africa, I want to talk about a few opportunities we have promoted through our rules and policies in the U.S., recognizing the critical role broadband plays in the development of all our economies, as well as the special importance wireless technologies have for communications in this region. No matter a country's size, wealth or geographic location, information and communications technologies are critical for economic development, the provision of healthcare and education, and connecting communities. There's telemedicine and tele-surgery and electronic medical record sharing. Similarly, mobile banking may provide financial services to those too poor or too geographically isolated to attract traditional banks. Farmers check commodity markets online and get the best prices and thus raise their incomes. Wireless build out can even help create entrepreneurial opportunities for isolated villagers, frequently “village women.” Thus, the pilot program in Nigeria and expansion to three other nations can truly be

transformative. In short, no matter where we live, ICT can help make us healthier, wealthier, safer, more productive – the benefits are seemingly endless for economies at the national level, down to the individual at the personal income level.

The (FCC) is involved in all aspects of policymaking for the ICT industries. Today I would like to discuss some of these policy areas and how they relate to the provision of broadband service.

Deregulatory Policies and Investment

First, across all issue areas, I approach policymaking with a philosophy that calls first and foremost for regulatory humility. This is something I have tried to practice, both as a State official and now as a Federal one. I recognize that most consumer benefits we see in the U.S. telecommunications market are directly related to the significant levels of competition, and to our deregulatory policies that have encouraged investment and thus fostered that competition. Indeed, governments do not create wealth, but we do have a role to play. Our policies must consistently provide correct incentives that are pro-entry.

Of course, I also understand the need for regulation, if and when there is a clear market failure. Such market failure is probably less common in communications markets as compared to other sectors, but we should not assume that it does not exist. Nor should we ignore the potential for “government failure,” such as when we adopt regulations that we intend and expect will benefit consumers but, in the long run, do not in fact do so. Whatever your regulatory philosophy, we must all strive for open processes – certainty,

clarity and transparency enable regulators to develop our own roadmap toward reasoned and reasonable policy.

Accordingly, I have been a strong proponent of a light regulatory touch for broadband service provided across platforms – including cable systems, telephone lines, power lines, and wireless systems. This helps ensure what we refer to as a level playing field among competing providers, no matter the technology or business model – that is, platform neutral and technology agnostic.

With regard to our deregulatory policies, the Commission has removed major impediments to broadband deployment by classifying broadband provided by DSL, BPL and wireless technologies as “information services” that will be subject to fewer of our outdated legacy rules, such as tariffs, price controls, and unbundling requirements on new investments. We streamlined our video franchise process, which will make it easier for new entrants such as telcos to provide broadband service as part of a triple play – voice, video and data.

The market has responded positively to this favorable regulatory environment. In 2007, private companies invested \$70 billion in communications infrastructure in the U.S., and an estimated \$15 billion was invested just to deploy broadband. As a result, more than 99 percent of our population lives in zip codes where a broadband provider serves at least one customer. Broadband via DSL is available to 82 percent of the households that receive service by a local exchange carrier, while broadband via cable

modem is available to 96 percent of households that receive cable television. Workplace broadband connections, both fixed and wireless, show that all businesses – not just the providers – benefit financially.

Spectrum for New, Advanced Services

The FCC has been a global leader in the establishment of rules to unleash the spectrum needed to promote broadband. In 2006, we auctioned licenses for the Advanced Wireless Services (AWS) band, which raised \$13.7 billion and made available 90 megahertz of spectrum for 3G services. We also are considering rules for an additional 40 megahertz of AWS spectrum (known as the AWS-2 and AWS-3 bands) to be auctioned in the near future. One proposal would be to use part of this spectrum to provide a free, family friendly broadband service.

We also recently made available more spectrum for the provision of wireless broadband services in the 700 MHz auction, which raised more money for our Treasury than any spectrum auction in U.S. history. This spectrum is part of the DTV transition, which is scheduled to take place in one day – February 17, 2009. We have recently held conferences with colleagues in Germany, the United Kingdom, and Sweden to learn about their DTV transitions. As we continue learning, we would welcome opportunities to work with all of you to share information and expertise, and in turn assist your countries as you make the digital transition.

In the U.S., portions of the spectrum made available as part of the DTV transition will be used to provide commercial services, such as mobile wireless broadband services,

while other portions will be used to provide an interoperable broadband network for the benefit of public safety. In March of this year, we concluded an auction for 62 megahertz in the 700 MHz band, raising more than any other U.S. spectrum auction – approximately \$19 billion. Our rules included an “open access” requirement for one block in this band, allowing consumers to use devices and applications of their choosing. In addition, small businesses – including small rural providers – were active participants in this auction, acquiring more than half of the licenses available. While we were less successful in establishing a public-private partnership to provide a nationwide, interoperable broadband network for public safety and first responders, the FCC is actively considering how to promote such a network and should move forward on this issue in the near future.

The broad availability of spectrum, combined with a light-touch approach to regulation that I just mentioned, has helped make the U.S. wireless market one of the most competitive in the world. And the benefits of such competition are huge. The average price per minute for mobile service is \$0.06, and there are over 250 million mobile subscribers in the U.S., who use over two trillion minutes every year.

Wireless services also account for the fastest-growing segment of the broadband market in the U.S., and they represent 35 million of the over 100 million total broadband connections. While some point to studies showing the U.S. with a below-average ranking in terms of broadband penetration, such studies often overlook important demographic differences between countries, such as household size and population density, or alternate means of connectivity, such as schools, libraries, community centers and even public

parks. The U.S. currently ranks first in the world in the number of Wi-Fi hotspots, with more than 66,000, but you'll hear more about this from Professor Spiwak and the Phoenix Center.

Universal Service and Rural Connectivity

Another issue of utmost importance to the U.S. Congress, the FCC, and your governments is ensuring that communications reach all citizens, no matter where they live. Our universal service policies are designed to meet this goal, but with untenable growth – the fund is now at \$7 billion – we must revamp our Universal Service Fund, which will take total and fundamental reform. I know many of you have similar goals in your countries, and even similar challenges in terms of providing communications to citizens who live in rural and remote areas. As chairman of the Federal-State Board on Universal Service in the U.S., I am well aware of the vast rural areas in my country and the need to extend communications services to these areas. I have had the opportunity to see first hand how broadband communications empowers those who reside in the most remote areas of America – but the fund can't be sustained without some tough and unpopular decisions.

Going forward, the FCC and Congress will be considering issues related to universal service and whether broadband – wireless or wireline – should be subsidized by the government, which ultimately is borne by the citizens and taxpayers. In my role as chairman of the Federal-State Board on Universal service, I am committed to the sustainability and long-term reform of this fund to ensure that all Americans have

continued access to world-class communications services at affordable rates, no matter where they live. We also must remain mindful that it is consumers who ultimately pay universal service contributions; any increase in the fund size will increase the burden on them, and distorts the free market and competitive landscape.

Healthcare

And speaking of worthwhile projects, I was excited to learn about the efforts to expand ICT services right here in Ghana. For example, Ghana's eCare centers provide access to cell phones, printers, faxes and the Internet in rural areas. Already 70 eCare centers are in operation in the country, serving half a million people, and there are plans to have as many as 200 of these centers in operation by the end of the year.

In the U.S., we recently launched our own new pilot project, a \$417 million nationwide program to promote broadband connectivity for healthcare facilities. This program will support 69 statewide and regional broadband tele-health projects, assisting citizens in 42 states and 3 territories. We expect to connect 6,000 public and non-profit healthcare providers to these tele-health networks, and we will share these innovative concepts with any of you who are interested as they develop and expand.

Protecting Children and Families

As we work to extend communications services to all our citizens, we should not forget our responsibility to protect the most precious of our citizens – our children. As a mother of three, I have been particularly involved in children’s issues in my professional career. Since arriving at the FCC, I have tried to be a strong and consistent voice arguing on behalf of children and families, and arguing against the negative impact on our children from unhealthy food advertisements to coarse and indecent programming on our public airwaves. Along with the incredible opportunities broadband provides, we must also recognize risks.

One of the most serious of these issues is the protection of children against threats online. Fortunately, this issue is receiving attention at the highest levels of the ITU, and I am delighted that Secretary-General Touré, the first lady of Egypt, many senior delegates at the APEC ministerial meetings, and officials in other countries are raising the dialogue to a global level. Throughout all of our societies, we recognize our children are our greatest natural resource, and so I look forward to working with Dr. Touré, and all of you, to ensure our children are connected and protected.

Conclusion

I want to close by reiterating my support, and that of the entire U.S. Federal Communications Commission, in your efforts. The light touch regulatory model that we have adopted – with a focus on enabling competition across technologies, platforms, and

markets – can help encourage investment by both foreign and domestic providers. The availability of spectrum for new services and new providers also is critical, especially in countries that depend on wireless technologies. A universal service program that focuses support where it is most needed – and provides the incentives for cost-efficiency, not duplication – can be a lifeline, especially to those in the most remote areas. And finally, I encourage all of you to ensure that your regulatory and legal frameworks protect children as they begin to explore the exciting – but potentially dangerous – world of cyberspace.

I look forward to continuing our dialogue here and in the future as we progress along the “Road to Opportunities.” Thank you.