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FCC Commissioner Ajit Pai speaks at IFE Media & Technology Roundtable

On February 5, 2015, His Excellency Björn Lyrvall, Ambassador of Sweden to the United States graciously hosted the Institute for Education's Media and Technology Roundtable (MTR) with Commissioner of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Honorable Ajit Pai.

The dinner began with Ambassador Lyrvall welcoming Commissioner Pai and guests to the Swedish residency and inviting all to discuss the timely issue of net neutrality. Coach Kemper, IFE Founder and CEO, thanked Ambassador and Mrs. Lyrvall for their stewardship and for their positive contributions to the fabric of D.C and Mrs. Catherine Bohigian, Charter Communications, for her leadership in MTR. Bohigian introduced Commissioner Pai praising the business perspective that he brought to the FCC as a result of his extensive experience across a multitude of government branches and in the private sector.



Commissioner Ajit Pai, Julia Winn, Dr. Tyrone Grandison, Madeleine Lyrvall, Coach Kemper, Ambassador Bjorn Lyrvall of Sweden, and Gajen Sunthara.

Commissioner Pai spoke about how technology has revolutionized societies for the better. He attributed these societal changes to increasing computational power, the ability to use technology as a networking tool, and the innovative developments in the use of wireless spectrum. Society is better off today because technology has enabled consumer driven experiences and businesses. For example, 3D printing has profoundly affected prosthetics now that suppliers can create products that

are tailored to consumers in very specific and dramatic ways. Technology has also disrupted the publishing industry by enabling the creation of numerous news outlets thus allowing more people to be consumers and producers of the news. Lastly, ride sharing and online house- and apartment- renting companies have disrupted and facilitated travel for consumers. These changes mark the shift in the technology industry from a supply-side economy to a demand-side economy, an economy driven by individual consumers.

During dessert the dinner took a lively turn as guests started a Q&A with Commissioner Pai and began actively discussing net neutrality. The focus was on what was best for consumers. Consumers want competition, better speeds, better prices and better broadband choices. Whether regulating broadband as a public utility under Title II of the Communications Act is the most advantageous way to protect consumers and ensure innovation and investment was hotly debated. Some guests believed that consumers pay a set fee a month and for that fee they want to be able to go where they want online. Internet users do not want to suppliers to determine what a fast lane or a slow lane is. On the other hand, the effect that regulating broadband as a public utility under Title II and the potential negative effects that would have on consumers, such as slower network speeds, less broadband deployment, lack of Internet service provider competition, and lack of innovation in the space was also discussed. Individual conversations spun off from the larger forum as coffee was served as guests delved further into these issues.

Guests in attendance included Chris Caine, Mercator XXI and IFE Steward; Marci Robinson, IFE Chairman of the Board of Stewards; David Fenstermaker, Raymond James; and Johanna Shelton, Google.

Contributed by IFE Fellow Kelsey Kemper Valentine