

Ajit V. Pai

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Ajit Varadaraj Pai (born January 10, 1973) is an American attorney who serves as the Chairman of the United States Federal Communications Commission (FCC). He is the first Indian American to hold the office. He has served in various positions at the FCC since being appointed to the commission by President Barack Obama in May 2012, at the recommendation of Mitch McConnell. He was confirmed unanimously by the United States Senate on May 7, 2012,^[1] and was sworn in on May 14, 2012, for a five-year term.^[2] In January 2017, President Donald Trump named Pai as Chairman of the agency.^{[3][4]} In March 2017, Trump announced that he would renominate Pai to serve another five-year term at the FCC, which will require confirmation by the U.S. Senate.^[5] Before his appointment to the FCC, Pai held positions with the Department of Justice, the United States Senate, the FCC's Office of General Counsel, and Verizon Communications.

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Early life and education

The son of Konkani^{[6][7]} immigrants from India,^[8] Pai was born on January 10, 1973 in Buffalo, New York. He grew up in rural Parsons, Kansas.^[9] Both of his parents were doctors at the county hospital.^{[10][11]}

Pai attended Harvard University where he participated in the Harvard Speech & Parliamentary Debate Society.^[12] He earned a B.A. with honors in Social Studies from Harvard in 1994 and a J.D. from the University of Chicago in 1997, where he was an editor of the *University of Chicago Law Review* and won the Thomas J. Mulroy Prize.^[13]

Career

Ajit V. Pai



Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission

Incumbent

Assumed office

January 23, 2017

President Donald Trump

Preceded by Tom Wheeler

Personal details

Born Ajit Varadaraj Pai
January 10, 1973
Buffalo, New York, U.S.

Political party Republican

Spouse(s) Janine Van Lancker

Children 2

Education Harvard University (BA)
University of Chicago (JD)

Following law school, Pai clerked for Martin Leach-Cross Feldman of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana.^[1] After moving to Washington, DC in 1998, Pai worked for the United States Department of Justice's Antitrust Division as an Honors Program trial attorney on the Telecommunications Task Force. There, he worked on proposed mergers and acquisitions and on novel requests for regulatory relief following the enactment of the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

Pai left his Department of Justice post in February 2001 to serve as Associate General Counsel at Verizon Communications Inc., where he handled competition matters, regulatory issues, and counseling of business units on broadband initiatives.^[1]

Pai left Verizon in April 2003 and was hired as Deputy Chief Counsel to the United States Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Administrative Oversight and the Courts. He returned to the Department of Justice to serve as Senior Counsel in the Office of Legal Policy in May 2004. He held that position until February 2005, when he was hired as Chief Counsel to the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Property Rights.

Between 2007 and 2011, Pai held several positions in the FCC's Office of General Counsel, serving most prominently as Deputy General Counsel. In this role, he had supervisory responsibility over several dozen lawyers in the Administrative Law Division and worked on a wide variety of regulatory and transactional matters involving the wireless, wireline, cable, Internet, media, and satellite industries.^[1] In 2010, Pai was one of 55 individuals nationwide chosen for the 2011 Marshall Memorial Fellowship, a leadership development initiative of the German Marshall Fund of the United States.^[1] Pai returned to the private sector in April 2011, working in the Washington, D.C. office of law firm Jenner & Block where he was a Partner in the Communications Practice.

In 2011, Pai was then nominated for a Republican Party position on the Federal Communications Commission by President Barack Obama at the recommendation of Minority leader Mitch McConnell. He was confirmed unanimously by the United States Senate on May 7, 2012 and was sworn in on May 14, 2012 for a term that concluded on June 30, 2016.^[1] Then Pai was designated chairman of the FCC by President Donald Trump in January 2017 for a five-year term.^[14]

Policy positions

Pai has been an advocate for less regulation during his tenure on the FCC. He is seen as a closer ally to broadcasters than other members of the FCC.^[15] In testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Communications and Technology on July 10, 2012, he warned about the dangers of regulatory uncertainty and the need for the FCC to keep pace with the dynamic communications sector.^[16] Pai also asserted that by reforming the way the commission works, the agency can facilitate the provision of new and better services at lower prices for American consumers.^[16]

Pai gave his first major speech since taking office on July 18, 2012 at Carnegie Mellon University. He discussed how the FCC can help promote economic growth and enhance job creation in the information and communications technology field^[17] by adhering to three basic principles: (1) the FCC should be as nimble as the industry it oversees; (2) the FCC should prioritize the removal of regulatory barriers to infrastructure investment; and (3) the FCC should accelerate its efforts to allocate additional spectrum for mobile broadband.^[18] Pai called for a reinvigoration of Section 7 of the Communications Act, which gives the commission a one-year deadline to review proposals for new technologies and services. He introduced the idea of creating an IP Transition Task Force to expedite the country's transition to all-IP networks. He urged the commission to settle the nine-year-old contributions reform proceeding for the Universal Service Fund by the end of the year. Finally, he advocated for completing the rules for the AWS-4 spectrum band by September 2012 and conducting the broadcast spectrum incentive auctions by June 30, 2014.^[18]

Pai wrote an op-ed for *The Wall Street Journal* in 2014 criticizing a proposed FCC study of the news-gathering practices of media organizations.^{[19][20]} In another 2014 letter, Pai criticized Netflix, writing that their Open Connect caching tools effectively secure fast lanes for its traffic.^[21]

In October 2014, Pai wrote an op-ed in *The Washington Post* criticizing a government-funded research project named "Truthy" at Indiana University which was studying the spread of "false and misleading ideas, hate speech and subversive propaganda" online.^[22] Pai questioned the value of the project, writing "should taxpayer money be used to monitor your speech and evaluate your 'partisanship'?" Truthy researchers defended the project, writing "we do not monitor individual people. The tweets we analyze are public and accessible by anyone."^[23] Indiana University issued a press release which said "the Truthy project is a basic computing research project designed to provide analytical insight into the ways in which information is spread across social media networks such as Twitter."^[24] U.S. House Science Committee Chairman Lamar Smith sent a letter to the National Science Foundation announcing a review of the grant.^[25]

As chairman, Pai scrapped a proposal to open the cable box market to tech companies such as Google and Amazon.^[26]

Net neutrality in the United States

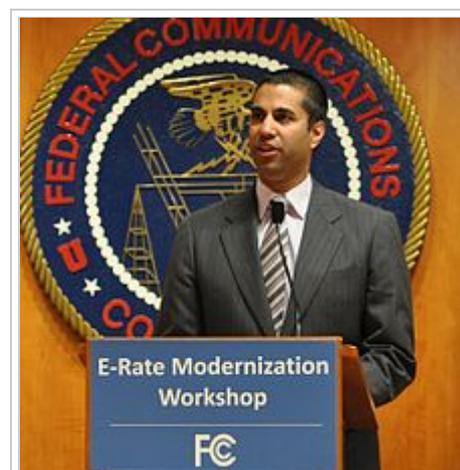
Pai voted against the FCC's 2015 Open Internet Order, which served as the basis for net neutrality regulations.^[27] He said in December 2016 that he believed net neutrality's days were "numbered,"^[28] and was described by the New York Times as a stickler on conservative interpretations of telecommunications law and the limits of the FCC's authority. As chairman, he also closed an investigation into zero-rating practices by wireless providers T-Mobile, AT&T and Verizon.^[29] On May 18, 2017, the Federal Communications Commission took the first formal step toward dismantling the net neutrality rules.^[30]

First Amendment issues

Pai highlighted First Amendment issues on the commission, citing them as a significant reason for voting against net neutrality. He called the Open Internet Order's declaration that Internet service providers have no freedom of speech an attempt to weaken the "culture of the First Amendment,"^[31] and said it was "conceivable" the agency would seek to regulate political speech offered by edge providers such as Fox News or the Drudge Report.^[32]

Prison inmate telephone calling costs

Pai argued against^[33] adoption of the FCC 2013 analysis^[34] and proposed rulemaking regarding the high cost of inmate telephone calls, referred to as Inmate Calling Service (ICS) by the FCC. He submitted his written dissent in which he argued that the nature of the exclusive single carrier contract between private ICS providers and prison administrators, meant inmates cannot "count on market competition to keep prices for inmate calling services just and reasonable."^[35] (ICS has become a \$1.2 billion telecommunications industry and the two largest providers in the United States were private equity-backed companies).^{[36][37]:23} Prior to the FCC's imposition of rate caps on interstate prison and jail phone calls in February 2014, the largest ICS provider Global Tel-Link (GTL) - which has been profitably bought and sold by private equity firms such as American Securities and Veritas Capital - charged some of the highest rates in the US – up to \$17.30 for a 15-minute call.^[38] The 2013 FCC analysis,^[34] described how, in some cases, long-distance calls are charged six times the rate on the outside.^[33] Pai opposed the FCC imposition of "safe harbor" of 12 cents with a cap of 21 cents on



2014 E-Rate Modernization Workshop

private ICS providers like GTL and CenturyLink Public Communications, arguing instead for a "simple proposal to cap interstate rates, with one rate for jails and a lower rate for prisons" that are cost-based to protect providers and ensure "some return on investment."^{[35][39]} In 2015, Pai again opposed rate caps on in-state inmate calls with families paying up to \$54 a phone call.^[40] He raised concerns about the increased use of contraband cell phones in prisons. In November 2016, the ICS provider won a halt to cap the rates. Pai criticized Democrats for appealing and the courts for intervening on ICS rate regulations.^[41] Shortly after his January 23 confirmation as chairman, Pai withdrew support for the FCC case involving GTL and CenturyLink set for February 6, 2017 which had called for curbing phone call prices.^{[26][42]}

Lifeline program

In 2016, Pai called for an investigation of potential fraud among beneficiaries of the agency's Lifeline subsidy for telecommunication services, contending that "apparent duplicates" who had signed up for the program improperly received \$476 million annually.^[43] He rescinded permissions for nine broadband providers to participate in the program after becoming agency chairman, stating those providers had not followed FCC guidelines requiring them to coordinate with the National Tribal Telecommunications Association in order to participate in the Lifeline program, and arguing the rules had been improperly circumvented by the previous Democratic commission.^[44]

Personal life

Pai lives in Arlington, Virginia with his wife and two children.^{[1][10]}

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