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Bram Abramson to the annual conference of the Canadian Association of Wireless Internet Providers

From: Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission

Speech

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**Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission
(CRTC)**

Check against delivery

Thank you for your kind introduction and warm welcome.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional unceded territory of the Anishnaabeg People. I would like to thank them and pay respect to their Elders.

I am delighted to join you again at the annual CanWISP Conference. This is your tenth anniversary event. Congratulations on your efforts over the last decade to represent the interests of wireless Internet service providers.

I have spoken at this event before. I see many familiar faces in the crowd. Some of us crossed paths during my previous roles as a legal and regulatory advisor to independent and competitive carriers, and through my board work with the CCTS and with ARIN. Though I'm wearing a different hat these days, I am still deeply immersed in issues such as lowering barriers to entry, reducing regulatory burden, and closing broadband gaps that I know are of interest to your members.

I would like to convey the best wishes of Adam Scott, CRTC Vice-Chair of Telecommunications, who is not able to be here today. It is my privilege to serve with Vice-Chair Scott and with all our colleagues as the Commission carries forward its work to ensure Canadians have access to a world-class communications system that enriches their lives. By that, I mean that we work to foster competition, affordability, reliability and innovation in the Canadian telecommunications sector. More plainly, this means ensuring Canadians benefit from more choice, lower prices and innovative services.

Updated policy

I'd like to touch on the new policy direction given to the CRTC by the government last month.

It instructs us to consider how our decisions would encourage all forms of competition, foster affordability and lower prices, and enhance the rights of consumers, among other objectives. It also speaks of the need to move quickly and to rely on sound and recent evidence in our decision making.

We, at the CRTC, welcomed the policy direction. It complements the actions we are taking to foster competition and provides us with clear directions.

This new approach reflects the expectations of Canadians. And it gives us a clear agenda. It is by no means an easy one. But with an energized team of Commissioners, the dedication of the staff at the CRTC, and a people-first approach, even difficult challenges become manageable.

That energy, that dedication, and that people-first approach is one that I know from my work with many of those in this room that you share. You are keenly aware that in today's interconnected world, virtually everything – from grocery delivery services to emergency services – is telecom-dependent. Few things are more important to Canadians than the availability, affordability, and reliability of innovative telecommunications services. Continued ingenuity, and continued investments from a range of sources in reliable networks across Canada, help safeguard these.

Let me briefly outline four recent actions we are taking on this front.

Promoting mobile wireless competition

Let's take mobile wireless competition for a start.

The CRTC is implementing its new approach to accelerating competition for mobile wireless services. The new framework is expected to assist regional wireless providers in expanding their services, creating more competition and increasing choice for millions of Canadians. In particular, smaller regional wireless providers in rural areas, where competition is more limited, can benefit from this initiative.

We are finalizing the terms and conditions for this wholesale access framework and are closely monitoring negotiations between the large wireless companies and regional providers. The CRTC directed the large wireless companies to begin accepting requests for wholesale access on

October 19, last year. It is of critical importance to support more competition in the mobile wireless sector, and it is in the interests of Canadians to have wholesale access operationalized.

Promoting Internet competition

Second, we're acting to improve competition in the Internet services market.

Earlier this year, we set new timelines to help competitors build broadband networks more quickly through faster access to the telephone poles owned by the large companies.

Then, roughly two weeks ago, we launched a consultation to tackle competition in the Internet services market more broadly. The goal of this consultation is to create more choice and lower prices.

To provide some relief to smaller competitors, we reduced certain wholesale high-speed access rates by 10%, effective immediately. We are broadly re-examining the rates that competitors pay to access the networks of the large telephone and cable companies.

We are also looking at accelerating competitive access to fibre networks across Canada. This will be the first issue we address as part of our review, since it would give Canadians more choice of higher speed Internet services.

Connecting rural and remote communities

While we encourage more competition in the market, we know that too many communities still lack access to high-speed Internet services. The CRTC's Broadband Fund already helps improve access to more than 200

rural and remote communities, including 89 Indigenous communities, through the projects it is helping to fund.

This progress is not insignificant, particularly for the people living in those communities who will soon benefit from better Internet access. However, we know we can do more. That's why, third, a few days ago we launched a review of the Broadband Fund to expand and speed up funding to close the remaining connectivity gaps.

We are proposing to create a new funding stream for Indigenous communities, as well as improvements to make it easier to apply and to receive funding faster. We are also looking at helping recipients with other expenses, such as operational costs and supporting improved reliability of networks.

We know the current process to evaluate and select projects can be demanding for small service providers and not as transparent as some might wish. We welcome your ideas on how to improve it, as well as your views on the other aspects under review. I encourage you to make your voices heard by 21 July, 2023.

To determine how best to improve the Fund, we need input from all parties and Canadians with an interest in rural and remote areas' connectivity, especially telecommunications service providers and Indigenous peoples. We also want to hear from communities, individual Canadians and public interest groups.

In the meantime, we continue to accept applications for the Broadband Fund. The Commission has issued a third call for applications. The deadline for submissions has been extended to May 16.

You can find information about the types of eligible projects on the CRTC website.

Telecom in the Far North

We are also focusing specifically on the needs of the Far North through our ongoing consultation. This includes some of Canada's most remote communities in Nunavut, the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, as well as northern British Columbia and Alberta.

With this proceeding, the Commission is exploring solutions to improve the affordability, quality and reliability of Internet and home phone services. We are also looking at ways to enhance competition. Finally, we are considering how we can support reconciliation and work with Indigenous peoples in the Far North to increase access to educational and economic opportunities that rely upon affordable, high-quality Internet services.

The Commission looks forward to hearing more on these issues at its public hearing starting on April 17th in Whitehorse, Yukon.

Enhancing the reliability of networks

Fourth, while we work to encourage competition and to improve access to high-quality services, we are also focused on reducing the occurrence and impact of outages on Canadians.

In February, we required all carriers to notify the CRTC within two hours of a major service outage. They must also provide to the CRTC a comprehensive report on the cause of the outage, the steps taken to resolve it and how they plan to prevent similar outages in the future. We are currently consulting on making this a permanent requirement.

This was only a first step. We are planning further consultations on developing a regulatory framework to enhance the resiliency of all networks, access to emergency services and consumer compensation, among other issues.

Conclusion

As you can see from my overview of our recent activities, this is an exciting time to be involved in the communications industry.

There is a lot on our plate. And it's a lot to get right, especially in a dynamic market. I'm not suggesting we'll wave a magic wand and instantly resolve a wide array of challenges. After all, we're confronting a complex and fast-changing sector that's fundamental to our lives and livelihoods.

However, we are confident that by remaining laser focused on the best interests of all Canadians, we are bound to succeed.

We also know that one of the best ways to achieve this goal is to listen closely to all Canadians. We will ensure that they have opportunities to participate in our consultations, and seek ways to enhance our timeliness, accessibility and openness.

We will also continue to rely on the insights of people like you. You are on the front lines. You serve your fellow Canadians to provide them with access to affordable, reliable and innovative broadband services no matter where they live.

We encourage and look forward to your ongoing participation in the Commission's consultations. In the meantime, we wish you all every success in your various ventures as this promising future unfolds.

Thank you.

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