TRACY: We have leadership from the Federal level with us as well.

One thing I can share is that in the past years,

SETDA has started our first

sort of special interest group around E-Rate,

we have a number of state leaders that are really dedicated

in their role, in their jobs.

So we now have this E-Rate, and we are excited that this group

is going to get go to the FCC on Wednesday;

but we're even more excited to have Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel

come give us a few remarks.

She has been a long time friend of SETDA

and she's also, she's now back on the commission,

she got back on in August of 2017.

(APPLAUSE)

And she was previously on admission from 2012 to 2017,

and you know, she really spent a decade and a half of public sector

and private sector communications lots of experience to her position

at SEC and one of my favorite things to do and talk about

is the, she cares very deeply about equity of access

for students both in and out of school

and is a real champion for this one.

So it's my pleasure to recognize Commissioner Rosenworcel.

(APPLAUSE)

JESSICA: Thank you so much.

Hi.

You might be reading outside

but you have a lot of energy in here.

I've never seen anyone throw around the blue queue to speak before.

(LAUGHTER)

And you know what, I probably should point out that so many organizations

they bore into Washington

that hold conferences, and set their priorities, and then they try to

inform and influence the federal sector.

Just about everyone of them does after the election.

I feel like it's bad for that you're here today, right now.

You're about education, you're all about getting a head start

and getting going before everyone else does.

And I like it.

I like that SETDA is on top of things.

Because of course what you do is so important

and I wanna talk a little bit about it today.

Actually I wanna talk about two ideas for education

and technology.

Think about it as one for right now and one for the near future.

So let's start with the here and now.

As you know, E-Rate is the largest education technology program

in the country.

It's the primary program we have to connect all of our schools

and the students in those schools to monitor communications.

And in Washington it is ran by an agency where I work,

the Federal Communications Commission.

And five years ago, the FCC begin a big effort

to update the E-Rate program and maybe hard to believe now,

five years ago, E-Rate was thoroughly stuck in the

dial up era.

But we need some changes with the help of a whole bunch

of people in this room, and school administrators,

and teachers, and technology experts from across the country,

we did something about it.

We made rockets called the E-Rate 2.0 and in response,

the SEC rebooted, recharged, and re-invigorate this program.

And now we have an E-Rate program that is built for the digital age.

That means it now has clear band width capacity goals

and where did we get those goals?

They were developed first by this organization.

We also updated the program budget, and that's a big deal.

On top of that we make sure that our technology

does better job in incorporating Wi-Fi for more one to one learning

in every school.

And you know what of those changes they've produced results?

More than 40 million students now have the broadband

they need in classrooms as result of those reforms,

more than 2 and a half million more teachers have classrooms

that are connected as a result of those reforms,

and its benefits have been specially dramatic in rural areas

which I've seen really high levels of increases in category two funding

to make Wi-Fi available in some our most remote locations.

Of course there's still work to do.

Application process is a little time consuming.

(LAUGHTER)

I need you to auction of the epic system.

An epic mess.

But more importantly we have also have work to do with connectivity.

In fact can this FCC data demonstrate,

that only 28% of our school districts are meeting

the long-term goals of one gigabit per thousand students?

Again, goal set by this organization.

So, lots of work to do; but I'm gonna tell you

I'm also concerned.

I'm gonna be very blunt.

Be clear, just why.

When I look around at the FCC

I realized my remaining colleagues did not support that

E-Rate 2.0 effort and right now, due to a commitment

that was made a few years ago, the FCC staff are preparing a report

to describe how changes that remain, including the category two

where Wi-Fi services.

Describe how they worked.

And makes some recommendations for the future.

That could be changes in what's funded,

could be a smaller budget,

could be a rollback to those reforms.

All of those things are possible so I'm concerned

and I hope you share that concern, too

because we do not wanna erase the gains that were made,

we do not wanna reduce the reach of this program,

cut off classrooms, or multiply administrative changes.

We've come too far now.

And if there are efforts to harm this incredible digital age program

I think we should push back.

And you could start by telling everyone you visit with

here in Washington and back home,

just how important E-Rate is.

It's the future of connectivity, it's the future of education,

and I think it's a program worth fighting for.

(APPLAUSE)

Next I wanna talk a little bit about the future

because while E-Rates connecting all of our schools,

we have got to think about how we get those students connected

at home, too.

Today, seven in ten teachers assign homework

that required internet access.

I mean that was not true when I was brought up.

But seven in ten teachers require some form

of online connectivity for students to get their score done.

But as you see data repeatedly show that one in three households

has no broadband access.

Given about where those numbers overlap,

that's what I call the homework gap

and I think it's one of our largest problems in digital equity to data.

There's a lot of evidence out there that homework gap is real.

The Bipartisan Senate joint economic committee

has found that there are 12 million students,

all across the country that fall into the homework gap.

And just two weeks ago,

the Pure Research Center issued new data

that show that one in five teens in this country

can't get nightly school work done because they, too,

fall into the homework gap.

Of course many of you may not need all that fancy research work

to tell you that the homework gap exists.

Because like me, you've probably seen it.

I know, up close, I've seen it in my travels across this country

in rural communities, in urban communities,

and everywhere in between.

In Texas I've talked to students

who do their nightly homework in fast-food restaurants

with a side of Fries.

In New Mexico, I've spoken to a high school football player

who comes back home and sits after games in the pitch black dark

of the school parking lot with a laptop on hand

because it's the only place where he can get a reliable signal

to do his school work.

And in Pennsylvania, I've talked to students who make

unbelievably elaborate plans to bring together

a patch work of visiting a library,

visiting friends, and visiting relatives to make sure that

they can get their papers written and their Math homework done.

And if you think about all of those kids they have such

extraordinary grit.

Many become confident they're gonna succeed,

but it shouldn't be this hard,

we should be able to fix this problem

and close this gap.

And there's so many things we can do.

We can start by studying the homework gap in our communities.

It's been done, the state of North Carolina,

and in my hometown, Hartford Connecticut,

they're gonna end this disastrous problem,

to try and identify exactly which communities

are most at risk of being left behind.

And that's even we've got communities that are also

taking really low tech efforts to build a solution.

Like building homework gap maps to say where

free Wi-Fi is available across the town

and some of those places are kind of places you'd expect,

like the libraries, and city hall;

but the funny thing is that once this project gets going,

there's a whole bunch of others that want to pitch in.

We've seen insurance offices, hotel lobbies,

and the local Walmart offer to open doors

to let kids know that they will provide a safe space for them

to do their homework.

That's community building exercise

that they still recognize the scope of the problem

and also gets them to pitch in and contribute.

Those are the low-tech kind of solutions.

I've got one that's really big, high-tech and let me be honest,

profoundly nerdy.

But I'm gonna share it with you this morning

so I think you might be my people.

(LAUGHTER)

And here's where it starts, it actually starts back

in the Kennedy Administration.

It's hard to remember now.

That's when TV was new.

And the FCC during the Kennedy administration

had this great idea, let's set up television stations

for all of our schools and give them licenses, 2.5 gigahertz band,

like maybe broadcast education into their student's homes.

It's really bold.

And if we're honest, it didn't work so well.

'Cause you know a lot of educators through the business of educating

students in school running a television station on the side,

not in their real house.

And over time the FCC started with.

Maybe we can take this service which was called

Constructional Television Fixers,

which is like most of your...

And maybe do something different with it.

And so in 2004, the FCC did something.

It renamed the service.

Education broadband service.

And say maybe we can use it for broadband.

And you know a few schools have done some interesting

things with these licenses.

Virginia, California, and a few others

have figured out ways to take this spectrum

and make it useful for the community at large.

But to be clear it's not easy.

So the FCC, let's put the schools, lease out the spectrum,

and others just have these licenses and just lays idle.

See but there's thing that's happened in the interim

called the smart phone revolution

and that spectrum, that all these schools have

has grown more and more valuable over time.

So how do we put it to use for modern education?

Guess what?

The FCC started another proceeding on this.

And I'm really hoping we can more than rename it this time.

But I am a little worried about what my colleagues

are thinking about, with the demand for 5G wireless service

and more air waves,

it looked at this man and said maybe we should just auction it off

to wireless carriers.

Maybe we should just acknowledge this experiment since the Kennedy

administration in giving these schools these licenses

hasn't worked that well.

We'll get rid of the educational component.

But I have another idea.

'Cause I always do.

I think we need to find a way to honor the educational history

of this spectrum.

We need to do it in a modern way

and this is where it gets complicated.

But what we could do is incentivize those with licenses

to return them to the FCC

and we do that by paying them to return the licenses

so schools with these licenses will be compensated

and the FCC will turn around, package all of those air waves

that managed to get returned and sell them off

to wireless providers for new 5G wireless service.

And then the funds that would come in from those auctions

could be the billions of dollars,

could be turned into a homework gap fund.

In other words, we could use the revenues for those air waves

to set up a fund to help address digital equity of every state

in this country.

I really do that in sorts of ways that we would need

the expertise of people in this room to help us identify what works.

I know I've seen connected school buses in rural areas

making a big difference.

Wi-Fi on wheels.

I've also seen libraries, both in this area and other parts

of the country were loaning out on Wi-Fi, hotspot,

can make a whole difference for a student who is most likely

to be left behind;

but the ideas is this, we repurpose those air waves,

we re-auction them and then we use the funds to address

the homework gap.

That's not simple; but I'll tell you we have some precedent

for something like this, because last year,

the FCC did something similar with a different spectrum band

we claim in the spectrum and broadcast and repurposing it,

and then use it to fund and support public safety,

policemen, fire fighters.

Seems to me that we could borrow that idea, and use it

for digital equity, the homework gap,

schools, and students.

So that's something I hope that I could pursue a little bit more

with you, including those of you who are coming and visit

my office later this week.

A lot of details in there and they're gonna require attention;

but the more attention we can bring to the power of E-Rate

and the importance of closing the homework gap, the better.

So thank you for what you did.

Thank you for being here.

(APPLAUSE)