

How Big Wireless Lobbied Governments to Build 5G for Citizen Data Collection and Surveillance

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While selling 5G technology to the public as a means for faster downloads, Big Wireless — comprising a web of telecom companies, lobbyists and law firms— is spending millions to lobby governments the world over to implement the next generation of cellular technology because of its potential for data collection and surveillance of citizens.

While the debate continues around 5G's potential impact on human health, the environment and wildlife, often overlooked in the discussion about 5G is how the technology will be used for data collection and surveillance. Big Wireless has spent over three decades lobbying state powers to build this technology while selling it to the public as a means for faster downloads.



5G Telecommunication tower antenna in morning sky Evening sky

In that time the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association – an organization whose leadership has maintained a revolving door relationship with the U.S. Federal Communication Commission – has collaborated on or guided regulatory policy related to not only 5G, but the roll out of cell phones and other digital technology. The CTIA annually lobbies for the industry to the tune of millions of dollars, making them one of the most powerful telecom lobby groups.

The COVID19 pandemic has caused governments around the world to lockdown their nations, cancel public school sessions, and cost millions of people their jobs. Fears of spreading the virus and overloading the healthcare system are triggering an authoritarian response from many of these governments — including the United States. For many Americans, these aggressive measures have halted typical daily activities. Taking a trip to the gym, work, school, or out with friends – are no longer an option.

However, while most non-essential activities have stopped, the controversial expansion of the 5th generation of cellular infrastructure has continued. With the support and lobbying of the CTIA, Big Wireless' 5G agenda is quickly expanding. [Records from ProPublica](#) show the CTIA lobbied for 2 recent bills related to 5G infrastructure.

On March 23, the 5G rollout took one step forward in the U.S. when President Donald Trump signed a bill aimed at "securing America's 5G infrastructure." The [Secure 5G and Beyond Act](#) calls for Congress to present a comprehensive plan for accelerating the nation's 5G network "not later than 180 days." The building of the next generation network has rapidly advanced due to the passing of the Secure 5G and Beyond Act and the [Broadband Deployment Accuracy and Technological Availability \(DATA\) Act](#), which passed the House in December 2019.

In April 2019, President Donald Trump held a press conference where he stated his intention to expand the U.S. wireless infrastructure as part of the effort to defeat China in the so-called "Race to 5G". During the press conference Trump stood next to the head of the Federal Communications Commission and telecommunication employees as he declared, *"The race to 5G is on and we must win."* While Trump is certain that America must win this apparent race - even during the middle of a pandemic - determining exactly who is the driving force behind the push towards the 5th generation of cellular technology requires digging through decades of lawsuits, industry corruption, and captured agencies.

What is 5G?

Over the last couple years telecom companies and governments have spent billions of dollars promoting, marketing, and building the next generation of telecom technology, known as 5G, or 5th Generation. The telecom companies involved in various aspects of the 5G rollout include Crowd Castle, American Tower, and Towerstream on the infrastructure side, and Comcast, Verizon, T-Mobile, Sprint, and AT&T on the internet/mobile service provider side.

Beginning with the introduction of 1G in 1979, a new generation of cellular standards has appeared approximately every ten years. Each generation is characterized by new frequency bands, higher data rates and non-backward compatible transmission technology. As we move into the 2020's, the shift to the 5th generation has begun. Beginning in late 2018, cities like Houston, Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Denver, San Diego, New York City, and Washington D.C. started deploying 5g for residential and commercial use.



While 5g is often touted as the solution to 4k movie downloads and virtual reality games, the new generation is also expected to herald the beginning of Smart Cities, where driverless cars, traffic lights, pollution sensors, smart phones and countless other smart devices interact in what is known as "The Internet of Things." The IoT has raised alarm bells for some privacy advocates because it will involve surrounding the public with hundreds of thousands of interconnected devices and sensors

which are gathering mass amounts of data that will be used for public advertising and monitoring of habits. 5G infrastructure will be the backbone to the IoT.

The switch from 4g to 5g is a change unlike those of previous generations. One notable difference is that 5G technology uses much higher frequencies, ranging from 10-300 GHz. Currently, 4G wireless systems operate on 700 to 2700 MHz. 5g is using millimeter waves which do not travel far and are easily blocked by trees, buildings, and walls. Due to the nature of mm waves the FCC has stated that for 5G to operate successfully it will require the installation of hundreds of thousands of new cell sites, towers, and additions to existing infrastructure.

Due largely to the concerns about this exponential increase in towers (and the subsequent [exposure to radiofrequency radiation](#)) the 5G roll out has been opposed by thousands of doctors, scientists, health professionals, and even the U.S. military and branches of the U.S. government. The movement against the 5G roll out also sparked a global day of protest in January and April 2020. Meanwhile, nations like [Sweden](#), [Slovenia](#), and cities like [Brussels](#), [Belgium](#) have decided to ban or temporarily halt the roll out of the new infrastructure until further health studies are conducted.

Who's Behind the Race to 5G?

For the last year, Americans have been peppered with messages from telecommunications companies and the tech industry at large, stressing the importance of being first in the *Race to 5G*. We are told if we want driverless vehicles, robot assistants, cleaner and safer cities, and more convenient lives we must support and pay for the upgrades to 5G. Apparently, the public should also ignore the fact that this upgrade has sparked lawsuits over health, privacy, and local power concerns. But beyond being a lackluster marketing campaign to convince the public to adopt the next generation of cell phones and devices, what exactly is this race about?

Geopolitically speaking, the *Race to 5g* describes the ongoing rift between the U.S. and China, the new digital Cold War where these two superpowers race to implement the next generation of cellular technology because of its potential for massive profit and massive data collection.

The American mainstream media and President Trump have stated that Chinese company Huawei could use their 5g infrastructure to spy on Americans. Additionally, Trump has called on federal officials and American companies to abandon Huawei equipment. In January [Foreign Policy wrote](#), "Because the (Chinese) companies that make the equipment are subservient to the Chinese government, they could be forced to include backdoors in the hardware or software to give Beijing remote access. Eavesdropping is also a risk, although efforts to listen in would almost certainly be detectable."

This fear of Chinese spying using 5g equipment completely ignores the reality that the U.S. government has the same exact opportunity to pressure American companies to spy on the private data of Americans. Foreign Policy noted, "These insecurities are a result of market forces that prioritize costs over security and of governments, including the United States, that want to preserve the option of surveillance in 5G networks. If the United States is serious about tackling the national security threats related to an insecure 5G network, it needs to rethink the extent to which it values corporate profits and government espionage over security."

Whether the public is actually demanding faster downloads is up for debate, but what is not debatable is that the telecoms, global governments, and the tech industry are pushing the shift towards 5g. While it is true that 5g has the potential to spur on innovation in the fields of medicine, manufacturing, entertainment, and other industries – it seems much of the hype around the 5G rollout is coming from the telecommunication industry itself, specifically the [Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association, or CTIA](#).

Established in 1984, the CTIA claims to represent the U.S. wireless communications industry, from carriers and equipment manufacturers. The CTIA “advocates for legislative and regulatory policies at federal, state, and local levels that foster the continued innovation, investment and increasing economic impact of America’s wireless industry. CTIA is active on a wide range of issues including spectrum policy, wireless infrastructure, and the Internet of Things, among others.” They also host events on topics ranging from cybersecurity to 5G.

The [CTIA’s Board of Directors](#) includes the presidents, CEOs and other senior officials of Verizon, Sprint, T Mobile, Nokia, Erricson, Intel, General Motors, Tracfone, EZ Texting and others. [Brad Gillen, the current Executive Vice President](#) of the CTIA, was formerly a Legal Advisor to a former FCC Commissioner and served in other senior policy roles at the FCC and with DISH Network. Mr. Gillen was also a partner at Wilkinson Barker Knauer, LLP, a law firm stacked with former employees of the FCC, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and other state government positions.

The CTIA’s [current President and CEO is Meredith Attwell Baker](#). Baker has spent the last [two decades](#) bouncing between lobbying for the telecoms and working for the government. From 1998 to 2000, Baker worked as Director of Congressional Affairs at the CTIA. From 2004 to 2007 she served under the Bush administration as Acting Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information and Acting Administrator of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). The NTIA is the President’s principal advisor on telecommunications and information policy. Afterwards, she worked for the U.S. government as an FCC Commissioner between July 2009 to June 2011. During her tenure at the FCC she was vocal about her opposition to net-neutrality regulations. In January 2011, she voted in favor of Comcast purchasing NBCUniversal. Only four months later she would leave the FCC to take her position as senior vice president of government affairs [at Comcast-NBCUniversal](#). Finally, in 2014 – after spending a decade bouncing between lobbying for industry and working for the government – Baker went back to the CTIA, where she is now President and CEO, responsible for promoting the Race to 5G.

One of the ways the CTIA has spread enthusiasm for the Race to 5g is by working with city officials. The CTIA has honored City Mayors who have worked to erode local authority regarding the 5g roll out. The 5G Wireless Champion Awards “honor the state and local officials” who “bring next-generation 5G networks” into communities and “remove barriers to the deployment of next-generation wireless infrastructure”. In 2018, the CTIA gave out 3 [“5g Wireless Champion Awards”](#) to mayors across the United States, including Houston’s Mayor Sylvester Turner.

The 5G Wireless Champion Awards are but one example of how the CTIA lobbies on behalf of the telecommunications industry, sometimes derisively known as Big Wireless. The industry has achieved the nickname due a revolving door between the government agencies designed to regulate the cellular industry – namely, the Federal Communications

Commission – and the industry itself. This arrangement has allowed the telecoms to grow while facing little legal challenges or roadblocks. In the process, this incestuous relationship has overtaken the voices and concerns of the American people.

A 2015 expose published by investigative journalist [Norm Alster](#) for the Harvard Edmund J. Safra Center for Ethics details the financial ties between the FCC and telecom companies and how the industry has direct access and power over the agency meant to regulate it. The report, [“Captured Agency: How the Federal Communications Commission is Dominated by the Industries it Presumably Regulates”](#), details how the FCC, an independent government agency created in 1934 to regulate interstate communications by radio, television, wire, satellite and cable, has become a captured agency with Big Wireless leaders filling the government seats in a revolving door fashion similar to other federal agencies.

Regarding the passing of the 1996 Telecom Act – the act meant to regulate the developing mobile phone and internet infrastructure – Alster writes,

Late lobbying won the wireless industry enormous concessions from lawmakers, many of them major recipients of industry hard and soft dollar contributions. Congressional staffers who helped lobbyists write the new law did not go unrewarded. Thirteen of fifteen staffers later became lobbyists themselves.”

Alster states that direct lobbying by industry is “just one of many worms in a rotting apple”. His report says the FCC is involved in a network of powerful moneyed interests with limitless access and a variety of ways to shape policy. Alster believes the worst part is that the wireless industry has been allowed to grow unchecked and virtually unregulated, with fundamental questions on public health routinely ignored. The Captured Agency report makes it clear that this type of corruption takes place because of “the free flow of executive leadership between the FCC and the industries it presumably oversees”.

For example, at the time of the report’s release, the Chairman of the FCC was Tom Wheeler, a man with deep ties to the wireless industry. In 2013, Wheeler was nominated as FCC chairman by former President Barack Obama after raising more than \$700,000 for his presidential campaigns. Wheeler led the two most powerful industry lobbying groups: The National Cable & Telecommunications Association (NCTA) and the CTIA. In 2010, Wheeler was also the head of the FCC during the debate around Net Neutrality.

Ajit Pai, current chairman of the FCC, is another example of this revolving door relationship. Pai is an attorney who served as Associate General Counsel at Verizon Communications Inc. between 2001 and 2003, where he handled competition and regulatory matters. Pai was appointed to the FCC by Barack Obama in 2012 and then made FCC Chairman by Donald Trump in January 2017. In an odd skit

In February, Pai admitted that the FCC failed to protect Americans’ privacy after it was [revealed](#) that at least two companies were gaining access to Americans’ private data and selling it to law enforcement. Pai called for a fine of over \$200 million on AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, and Sprint. “This FCC will not tolerate phone companies putting Americans’ privacy at risk,” [Pai stated](#) when announcing the fine.

FCC Commissioner Brendan Carr is yet another example of a government official working closely with industry and maintaining relationships which clearly present conflicts of

interest. Carr is credited with accelerating the 5G build out. Prior to joining the FCC, Carr worked as an attorney at Wiley Rein where his clients were Verizon, AT&T, Centurylink, and CTIA.

The Wiley Rein law firm is a hotbed of activity for former government officials and industry regulars. One of the founders of the law firm is Richard Wiley, himself a Former FCC Chairman. According to [Open Secrets](#), in the first four months of 2020 the Wiley Rein law firm has been retained by several telecoms, including AT&T for \$80,000, the CTIA for \$50,000, and Verizon for \$30,000. For the last 15 years the law firm has spent at least \$2 million dollars lobbying for their clients. Open Secrets also shows the CTIA has spent \$3 million on their own lobbying efforts.

On September 30, 2019, Commissioner Carr and other FCC officials were in Houston to discuss the future of 5G. I interviewed Commissioner Carr about the concerns regarding his connections with the wireless industry, as well as the implications of the Captured Agency report released by Harvard's School of Ethics. Unfortunately, Mr Carr had no interest in addressing these questions and refused to answer my questions and only stated, "We're excited about the 5G build out and working with local leaders."

The silence from FCC officials on the charges of corrupted regulators and ignored studies is simply another facet of the relationship between industry and government. Again, the strongest influence over the U.S. regulatory agencies can be traced to the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association.

A History of Big Wireless Bullying and Corruption

In 2018, Senator Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut exposed that Big Wireless and the FCC have failed to adequately fund independent studies into the health effects of emerging 5G technology. At a Senate Commerce committee hearing, [Blumenthal questioned](#) Brad Gillen, Executive Director of the CTIA, about the absence of this research.

How much money has the industry committed to supporting additional independent research—I stress independent—research? And we're talking about research on the biological effects of this new technology," Blumenthal asked. To which Gillen responded, "There are no industry backed studies to my knowledge right now."

At the end of the exchange, Blumenthal concluded, *"So there really is no research ongoing. We're kind of flying blind here, as far as health and safety is concerned."*

One of the reasons Americans are "flying blind", as Blumenthal stated, is because of a history of pressure and defunding of researchers who reached conclusions which were at odds with the official line of the wireless industry: *cell phones and wireless devices do not cause harm to humans or animal life.*

During the 1990's, biochemist Jerry Phillips was hired by cell phone giant Motorola to study the effects of the radiofrequency radiation emitted by cell phones. Phillips previously worked with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Pettis VA Medical Center in Loma Linda, California and is currently the director of the Excel Science Center at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. His team looked at the effects of different RF signals on rats and on cells in a dish. In the documentary [Public Exposure](#), Phillips says the relationship

between him and his employer was initially cordial but soured once he submitted research data to Motorola which found that exposure to radio-frequency radiation produced by cell phones caused damage to the DNA structure. The negative results were not to Motorola's liking and they began putting pressure on him.

These folks were very, very upset, and began to talk about how they are going to handle this, what sort of spin can we put on this, what can we expect from this. From that point on the relationship changed," Phillips states in the documentary. "What we saw was that Motorola began to exert more and more control over the work. Telling us what to do, telling us how to write abstracts, what to say in the abstracts, what to say in the papers, how to do the work. No, don't do this. Yes, do it this way. This was unacceptable."

Phillips describes how Motorola was unwilling to accept his study and urged him not to publish it. Despite the pleas, Phillips published his [study in the Journal of Bioelectrochemistry and Bioenergetics in 1998](#) and ceased his work with Motorola. Phillips cautioned that independent research on cell phones is sparse because *"there is no money available for research other than what's coming from industry."*

In another example of industry attempting to influence research, Dr. Henry Lai, the University of Washington, and fellow researcher Narendra Singh were looking at the effects of nonionizing radiation – the same type of radiation emitted by cell phones and 5G – on the DNA of rats. The researchers found that the DNA in the brain cells of the rats was broken by exposure to radiation. Dr. Lai's experiments showed negative health consequences at levels considered safe by the FCC.

After publishing the research in 1995, Dr. Lai would later learn of a ["full-scale effort"](#) to discredit the experiments. At some point Motorola became aware of Lai's unpublished results showing harm from cell phone radiation. In a [leaked internal Motorola memo](#) executives claimed to have succeeded in "War-Gaming " and undermining the Lai-Singh experiments. Lai and Singh caused further controversy when they publicly complained that their funders, the Wireless Technology Research (WTR) program, had placed restrictions on their work.. In response to the complaints, George Carlo, the head of the WTR, sent a memo asking Richard McCormick, president of University of Washington at the time, to fire Lai and Singh. McCormick refused, but a clear message had been sent to the researchers.

This shocked me. The letter trying to discredit me, the 'war games' memo," Lai [told Seattle Mag](#). "As a scientist doing research, I was not expecting to be involved in a political situation. It opened my eyes on how games are played in the world of business. You don't bite the hand that feeds you. The pressure is very impressive."

Once again, the fingerprints of the CTIA are found in this attempt at suppressing unfavorable studies. Carlo had recently been appointed head of the WTR after the FCC and the CTIA promised to fund research into the dangers of cell phones. The move came in 1993 after David Reynard [sued the NEC America company](#) because he blamed his wife's lethal tumor on their phone. Reynard's story became a national sensation, leading to a congressional investigation. Wheeler claimed the new studies would "re-validate the findings of the existing studies." Soon after, Carlo would ask the University of Washington to

defund Lai for alleged violations of research protocols and Lai would accuse the WTR of interfering with his experiments. Eventually, Carlo himself would have a falling out with the FCC and rebrand [himself as a whistleblower](#). He also accused the FCC and the CTIA of covering up evidence of cell phone harms.

5G Conspiracy Theorists?

Despite the diverse credentials of the mass movement against 5G, the opposition has largely been derided as conspiracy theorists or quacks who don't understand the electromagnetic spectrum. In March 2019, William Broad of the New York Times [wrote a piece promoting](#) the idea that those who are concerned about the health effects of 5G are simply falling prey to Russian propaganda designed to make America lose the Race to 5G. His article, "Your 5G Phone Won't Hurt You. But Russia Wants You to Think Otherwise.", sought to place the blame for concern around 5G on the shoulders of America's favorite boogeyman – The Russians.

This practice seems to be a new trend for corporate media as [the Washington Post announced a similar deal with ATT](#) in November 2019. Questions regarding potential conflicts of interest have not been addressed between news outlets attacking those critical of 5G's safety and telecom companies who fund them.

Interestingly, only a month after Broad's article, in April 2019 the [Times announced a partnership with Verizon](#) to showcase a "5g journalism lab". Broad wrote a second piece titled "[The 5G Health Hazard That Isn't](#)", attacking the critics of the rush to 5G and attempting to paint the opposition as being based on one single study which he says was found to be false.

Dr. Devra Davis, PhD, President of the Environmental Health Trust, [responded to Broad's claim](#) by noting that "by relegating concerns about 5G to a Russian ploy, he misses altogether the fact that the purportedly independent international [authorities](#) on which he relies that declare 5G to be safe are an [exclusive club](#) of [industry-loyal scientists](#). [China, Russia, Poland, Italy](#) and several other European countries allow up to [hundreds of times less](#) wireless radiation into the environment from microwave antennas than does the U.S.."

Davis went even further, comparing the treatment of those who raise awareness about the public impact of radio frequency microwave radiation to that of those scientists in the 1950's and 60's who attempted to ring alarm bells about the dangers of tobacco. Davis wrote,

Scientists who showed the harmful impacts of tobacco found themselves struggling for serious attention and financial support. For health impacts from wireless radiation, a similar pattern is emerging. Each time a U.S. government agency produced positive findings, research on health impacts was [defunded](#). The Office of Naval Research, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and the Environmental Protection Agency all once had vibrant research programs [documenting](#) dangers of wireless radiation. All found their programs scrapped, reflecting pressure from those who sought to suppress this work."

These forces which "sought to suppress this work" have indeed been operating and

influencing public policy on cellular technology for decades.

This cursory look at the history of the FCC, the CTIA, and the cell phone industry show clear conflicts of interests and suppression of research. Now, these same forces are calling on the public to embrace the *Race to 5G*. While most of the public is unaware of this history, understanding the corporate and lobbyist influence on the scientific research and light regulatory touch, is absolutely imperative as the world prepares to be surrounded by the devices and infrastructure of the emerging 5G industry.

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