

Statement of FCC Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission
September 15, 2016

Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson and Members of the Committee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to outline my vision for bringing robust, affordable and ubiquitous connectivity to all Americans. There is much to report in the six months since I last testified before this Committee.

#ConnectingCommunities

In April, I launched my #ConnectingCommunities Tour, a concept formed out of a desire to see and hear from rural and urban communities as well as those with and without connectivity. Just last month, I visited New Mexico, where I joined Senator Udall for a roundtable discussion on expanding broadband access. We discussed how costly it is to deploy services, particularly on Native lands. Even in places where broadband is deployed, the lack of internal infrastructure amongst anchor institutions like a school or library, can make it inaccessible to populations most in need.

In the days following my visit, I heard from Randy, a software developer from Edgewood, New Mexico. Despite living just 20 miles east of Albuquerque, his fastest option for fixed broadband is 7.5 megabits per second (Mbps), at a price of around \$62 per month. In his letter, he described broadband as a “cold hard necessity in the digital age.” Unfortunately, my experience in traveling the country has demonstrated that Randy’s story is not a unique one.

By the time my #ConnectingCommunities tour wraps up with a “solutions-focused” policy forum on October 19th, I will have visited 10 states including Arizona, California, Colorado, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Washington and West Virginia. The forum, which will be held at Georgetown University Law Center, will highlight my observations from the visits and focus on proposing answers to some of the toughest challenges facing the communications sector, including broadband affordability, viewpoint diversity and inmate calling reform.

Advancing Opportunities for Independent Programming

I am also excited to share that the Commission will tee up a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) later this month, which stems from our inquiry on independent programming. Following more than 36,000 filings in the docket in response to our prior Notice of Inquiry, the Commission has built a record that makes clear that there are real challenges facing independent programmers and consumers are paying the price with higher monthly programming costs and restrictions that limit their ability to watch their favorite content through online platforms.

Since launching the inquiry in February, I have continuously asked: Is there an answer for those frustrated consumers seeking more diverse programming, as well as programmers

looking to expand their reach to more households? Is there a disconnect and if so, where is it? And does this all mean that our existing system is broken and if the answer is yes, who should fix it? The NPRM that the full Commission will consider on September 29th continues the process of asking and ultimately answering these questions.

Connect2Health – Examining the Intersection between Broadband and Health Policy

Third, the Commission through its Connect2Health Task Force continues to focus on the intersection of broadband connectivity, advanced technology and health. I am incredibly proud to tell you about our new broadband health mapping tool, which allows federal, state and local agencies as well as the private sector to examine the relationship between connectivity and health at a local level, identify current issues, and develop future solutions to address connectivity gaps and promote positive health outcomes.

We have learned from this initiative that rural counties are ten times as likely as urban areas to have low broadband access and high diabetes. Similarly, the neediest counties when it comes to the intersection of broadband and health are concentrated in the South and Midwest. Knowing this information, will help both the public and private sectors target limited resources to improve infrastructure and deploy connected health technologies.

It is for these reasons that I applaud the bipartisan introduction of the *RURAL Telehealth Act* by Senators Wicker and Schatz. The bill recognizes that non-rural hospitals and health-care providers may be best positioned to bring telehealth services to rural communities. By limiting Healthcare Connect funds to providers who predominantly serve rural areas, the legislation preserves the FCC’s goal of delivering advanced telehealth services to communities most in need.

Advancing 5G Connectivity

Finally, I believe the Commission is on the cusp of something “big” when it comes to the deployment of 5G wireless services. According to the latest research, mobile data traffic has grown 4,000-fold over the past 10 years and almost 400-million-fold over the past 15 years. We have seen the need for mobile data continue to grow as more American consumers take advantage of their smartphones and tablets in ways unheard of even a few years ago.

In July, the FCC took a momentous step towards bringing next generation wireless technology to consumers by making available nearly 11 gigahertz (GHz) of high-band spectrum available for licensed and unlicensed use. The governing rules, which balance different approaches such as exclusive use licensing, shared access and unlicensed access, will enable established industry players and entrepreneurs to develop innovate offerings for consumers.

Opening up spectrum above 24 GHz is just the next of many steps in the path towards 5G technologies. As we move into this new age of increased connectivity, it is essential that those who live in rural areas and high-rent urban areas are a part of this new frontier and that industry and government work together to make sure to narrow, rather than widen the digital divide in the

country.

Thank you again for allowing me to share my priorities with you this morning. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.