

**Prepared Remarks of FCC Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn**  
**NATOA**  
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Thank you, Ken and NATOA, for such an incredible honor and for the opportunity to join you this afternoon. When I spoke out this spring in support of my neighbors in the Carolinas who were fighting for their right to receive and promote high-speed Internet, it never occurred to me that this position was especially news and noteworthy because for me, it was simply the right thing to do. I wasn't the first and only voice speaking up on behalf of cities and towns having the flexibility to deploy high-speed Internet when their needs weren't being met. For even a year earlier, the crafters of the National Broadband Plan made the same recommendation.

Where there are citizens who need access to broadband and aren't getting it, those communities that have accepted the responsibility to address their everyday needs, should naturally have the flexibility and ability to deliver that essential service themselves. This should not surprise anyone. Generations ago, many rural communities had to embrace the self help concept in order to obtain basic utility services—water, electric, and telephone connection.

All of this seems perfectly logical to me. Unfortunately, logic didn't prevail in this particular instance. So I trust that you forgive me for admitting to being a bit surprised, and perhaps a little embarrassed, to hear that I was receiving this award for this particular effort. In fact, my staff had been teasing me a bit about this, because recognition of this sort usually comes on the heels of a successful outcome, you know, like say our multi-year quest to complete universal service and intercarrier compensation reform.

Seriously, I am truly am honored to be aligned with your leadership on this issue. My fellow honoree, Catharine Rice, your supporters and friends throughout this organization who spoke up—sometimes in defense of my speech and statement on this matter—Ken Fellman, Steve Traylor, Joanne Hovis, and Jim Baller... All of these committed individuals work so hard to benefit the citizens of your communities, and we owe them our gratitude for their commitment and dedication, to the promotion of broadband deployment and service, for our nation.

I don't have to convince anyone here how broadband has the potential to change lives and communities. It is no longer just a "luxury" service, it is an "essential" service. A few months ago, I listened to a citizen in Nebraska who had moved from one suburb to another but didn't realize, until after her move, that broadband wasn't offered on her side of the street. This revelation wasn't simply a disappointment to her, it was a *disruption* to her life. She could no longer seamlessly access her financial information online or use e-mail to communicate or conduct business from her home.

Last week, during my meeting with organizations representing schools, libraries, and health clinics, it was stressed to me that faster broadband is needed by community anchor institutions that are serving numerous citizens simultaneously. Whether it's from constituents who currently cannot access broadband from home, or community anchor institutions that need faster service, it seems everyone wants it, yet not everyone can get it.

In fact, the Commission's recent Broadband Progress Report noted that up to 26 million Americans don't have access to broadband service. And I, like you, believe this number is too great, and the needs of these Americans should be addressed. That report focused on fixed broadband—what consumers can obtain from cable and phone companies.

On the wireless side, hundreds of millions are using mobile telephone service, and we see a trend where more consumers are adopting smartphones and are primarily accessing the Internet over their wireless devices. This especially holds true for minorities, who more often access the Internet via a mobile device at a much higher rate than white Americans.

Because of these trends, I think it is extremely important that our policies promote the availability of both fixed and wireless services. Residential and enterprise consumers each expect it. And by providing the foundation for robust communication networks—both wired and wireless—in every community, we can encourage economic development, job creation, investment, and innovation.

Each of us has a role to play with respect to this goal. At the Commission, we are working hard to reform our policies in response to the vast technological changes that have occurred in the last decade. For example, we currently are in the midst of considering Universal Service Fund reform—a Fund that has been a critical resource for our nation. We have been able to provide affordable phone service in remote and high cost areas of the country as a result. In addition, low-income consumers have received discounted phone service, and schools and libraries have been able to obtain discounted phone and Internet service.

For about a decade now, the Commission has permitted phone companies to invest USF proceeds in networks that can offer both voice and broadband service. Because of this policy, additional private investment made by providers, the technological changes that permitted cable to begin offering broadband and voice service, as well as the local and state policies that encouraged build out by cable companies—hundreds of millions of Americans can now access voice and high-speed Internet service. It was the confluence of good policy, technological advancements, and significant investments that have resulted in the broadband coverage we have today.

Yet, a digital divide remains. Tens of millions of Americans still do not have broadband physically available to them, and approximately 100 million have not adopted it. As good as our policies have been, they need to be better. And we each have the capacity to ensure that broadband is available and affordable for all Americans.

The Commission's role in addressing the communications needs of our nation has evolved over time. First the focus was on telephone and radio. Then, as technology advanced, we added television, cable, mobile wireless, and most recently, broadband. As you consider your part in the communications space, your roles have changed as well. From rights-of-way management, to negotiating and enforcing local franchising agreements, to approving wireless tower sitings—you all have had to evolve in your service to the public. And of course, that evolution will continue.

When I arrived at the Commission just two years ago, our staff was hard at work drafting the National Broadband Plan. This plan had been called for by Congress, after prompting from several communications and policy experts, including my good friend and colleague, Commissioner Copps. They saw the potential for broadband to transform our nation, and they insisted on a national strategy to ensure every citizen could be connected and benefit from it.

Since March of last year, this Plan has been our guide for considering the policies that need to be modified so that consumers have better access to advanced communications services. It identified many areas that we need to address to better promote broadband availability and affordability. It emphasized the need for each level of government to work in concert to ensure that broadband can be delivered to consumers.

I continue to appreciate how each level of government brings their own unique perspective to these issues. At the state and local levels, you are close to consumers. You know which areas have the best service, which areas have no service, and which constituents are more likely to be left behind. By working together, we can identify the gaps and direct our resources to better tackle the divide.

A lot of our focus and your attention have been on deployment, and I continue to believe this is an important endeavor for us all. But it's not enough just to build the broadband networks and assume everyone will come. We must view our roles as more expansive than the chief promoters of broadband deployment. It is a must that we promote digital literacy, broadband use and affordability.

It is encouraging to meet individuals who are committed to educate seniors, the working class with no computer experience, and youth. Librarians, community organizers, and many others, are transforming peoples' lives, one by one through computer and online instruction. Here, in California, for example, several community organizations have come together in a single goal—to train and connect one million new Internet users in 2011. They are targeting low-income, minority parents who have children in middle school. The parents will be trained to access and navigate specific content on the web that will help them guide their children to college.

Community Union told me that their goal is to encourage sustainable adoption of broadband technology in marginalized communities and that they are using the resources that already are present in their communities—school computer labs—that are otherwise sitting idle when the dismissal bell rings. They maintain that they are turning the school lab into an empowerment hub, where parents learn skills from turning on a computer and using a mouse, to navigating the Internet, emailing, and finding the tools to help their children to attain a high school diploma and go onto college.

These goals took enhanced meaning to me for just last week, the Census Bureau reported that the nation's poverty rate had increased to 15.1%—its highest since 1993. More than 46 million people—almost one in six—were classified as poor last year. Children were hit especially hard. More than one in five qualified as poor last year. And for African Americans and Hispanics, the poverty rate was about two and a half times greater than it was for non-

Hispanic whites. In addition to the basic needs of these Americans, we must do our part to educate and prepare vulnerable communities for this digital age. If we don't, they may be left even further behind. Every child needs an education, and now this includes a digital education—a pathway to gaining skills that will lead to jobs, stability, and hopefully prosperity.

But the basic truth is that many who are living below the poverty line cannot afford broadband at home. Adoption for low-income households lags significantly at only 40% for families with an annual income of \$20,000 as compared to 91% of those with annual income above \$75,000. For these families, they are at significant disadvantage. Their children cannot use the Internet after hours to complete their homework. And as more schools are moving to online communications, the parents are also impacted by the disconnection. It's harder to keep up with the latest information about their children's education, and it is more difficult to protect children from dangerous liaisons on-line.

While our community anchor institutions, such as libraries, are essential for bridging this significant shortfall, many of those institutions are suffering due to budget cuts. They have had to shorten their hours. And the demand is great for computer time, so there typically are waits for a computer, and limits on how long patrons can use a terminal. Therefore, as a nation, no matter how critical things are for us economically, it is important that we address the connectivity needs of low-income families.

It is a noble and sustainable goal to use these technologies to help lift entire families out of poverty through education and digital connection. The FCC is looking at how we can modify our policies to further assist and the private sector has begun offering significantly discounted broadband equipment and service to these families, along with digital literacy training. And yes, while much has been done, there is still much more to do. The patchwork of opportunities in each community is in critical need of local involvement and coordination. These programs cannot reach their full potential if communities are not aware of them. So it is a must that we all become more involved. I believe the members of NATOA are in a unique position to play an even more vital role in strengthening the communications networks by raising the focus on, and further promoting the digital literacy and broadband adoption efforts that are currently underway in your communities. Where those needs persist, you are among the best in helping to inform those organizations where the greatest needs are, including those broadband providers, that you know really want to help make a difference in the digital divide in your communities.

So to all of you Broadband Heroes, I wish to again thank you for your extraordinary dedication to public service. While it is not always easy, this is an incredible time to be a public servant because in addition to your natural drive and determination to better serve your communities, we now have these incredible technologies with unlimited potential to enhance those efforts and change our neighbors' lives. I remain committed to working to advance the policies that will achieve optimal improvements for all consumers. By doing that, we are really and truly enhancing the lives of *every* American. Thank you.