



NEWS

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FCC COMMISSIONER MICHAEL K. POWELL CRITICIZES APPARENT POLITICIZATION OF COMMISSION BUSINESS

I am sincerely troubled by what appears to be the unabashed politicization of Commission business. Yesterday, Chairman Kennard and my democratic colleagues eagerly issued supportive press statements in response to what is reported as “Mr. Clinton’s proposal” to help Native Americans to receive and maintain affordable phone service.

Contrary to the impression engineered that this initiative is a new and dramatic proposal by the Administration, this initiative is in fact a Commission item that was formally initiated in August of last year. The Commission has yet to consider it fully and has not voted. Thus, I am surprised to see the matter being loudly heralded as a new and dramatic initiative by the Administration.

My real concern, however, is not with the President’s endorsement. Surely, the President is free to propose or endorse anything he wishes. Indeed, I am heartened that the President takes an interest in the FCC’s agenda. Nor, do I take issue with the potential merits of the proposal. It is our duty under the statute to promote and advance universal service, and so we must look hard at situations such as that on tribal lands where telephone penetration significantly lags behind the rest of the country.

I do, however, strongly object to the Chairman carefully orchestrating Commission business to play on the political stage in support of White House activities. In particular, I am disturbed when the Commission’s professional staff is unwittingly employed in support of such an endeavor. Such action puts at risk the independence and integrity of the FCC and its career staff by purposely joining our authority and agenda with that of the Administration. We are now credibly subject to the criticism that our decisions are not the product of an independent evaluation of what is in the public interest, but are instead a bow to what is in the political interest.

I sincerely hope that this matter is not just the first in a series of activities designed to build a legacy and promote political outcomes in this election year. If so, the FCC institution that remains after the principal actors have exited stage left will be badly tarnished.

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