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REMARKS TO THE JOINT CENTER FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STUDIES
MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY FORUM
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Thank you for coming out on this cold, rainy morn. Two special thanks. First to the Joint Center, its President and my friend of 33-plus years, Ralph Everett. Ralph has brought dynamic energy, real focus and new luster to this already illustrious organization by his vision, his knack for knowing how to get good things done, and his one-of-a-kind credibility in this town. And then to my friend of more recent vintage, Julius Genachowski, who is bringing energy, focus and vision to the FCC. In just a few weeks, you will see what I've said translated into a Broadband Plan for America—a strategy to energize the deployment and adoption of broadband all across this country, a plan with the potential to open doors of opportunity that previous generations couldn't even dream about. This plan will be harvested from the deepest, widest, most open and transparent proceeding I can remember at the Commission. It is a plan our country urgently needs, and it is thanks to Chairman Genachowski that America will take delivery of it on March 16.

Good news is that, even before release of the Plan, we are beginning to harvest the fruits of this work. Julius and the FCC Broadband Team have already succeeded in getting us to look at broadband ...well, broadly. They have educated us to see it not as a technology or sector unto itself, but as part of the solution to just about every major challenge confronting the nation today, so that we begin to understand how a really good plan for the ubiquitous deployment and universal adoption of broadband will enable us to better tackle job creation, energy dependence, environmental degradation, inadequate healthcare and the closed doors of economic and social opportunity that continue to hold back millions of our fellow citizens. Increasingly we realize that broadband is the Great Enabler that can fuel America's resumed forward march. And I'm happy to see the Joint Center also encouraging us to think holistically and synergistically about broadband. Indeed the title of this morning's event is "The Open Internet, Innovation and Economic Growth"—like love and marriage or the horse and carriage, you can't have one without the other.

Our challenges are so immense and so immediate. And one of the starkest is the lack of digital inclusion. Last week's Joint Center Report on National Broadband Minority Adoption helps us understand more about where we are in this country. While we see continued adoption among minorities, we also learn—and this is a quote from the Report—"Those Americans who stand to gain the most from the Internet are unable to use it to break the cycles of social isolation, poverty, and illiteracy." So those segments of the population most weighed down by economic and social hardship are the very ones denied the digital access they need to improve their lot. They're not part of the growing digital information ecosystem of the Twenty-first century. They are African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, disabled Americans, poor Americans, rural Americans, inner city Americans—let's just say: too many Americans.

There's one very good thing all these Americans have going for them, however. Her name in Mignon Clyburn, and in her first months at the FCC she has demonstrated a level of

commitment and tenacity on the issues of equal opportunity and digital inclusion that have made her a true champion of those who need a champion most. She's fighting the good fight, she's making a difference, and I hope everyone here recognizes the extraordinary job she is doing.

With so many individuals and communities still left behind, perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that the Internet that's taking shape doesn't yet look quite like the diverse America so many of you in this room are trying to nurture. As recent scholarship is beginning to show—and this may sound blunt but I think there's more than a little to it—the folks who are most active and who are the major players on the Net are, more often than not, better off economically and more highly educated than the rest of us, and they are also more often white and male than the nation as a whole. One very stimulating book on this subject is Matthew Hindman's *The Myth of Digital Democracy*. On top of that, it is companies with scale and power who configure the routes and determine where we all go—or are directed to go—when we log on in search of whatever it is we're searching for.

It can all work great if you know what you're doing. You can unlock undreamed of treasure troves of good and wonderful things. It can be, for such people, the Great Enabler I talked about earlier. But to know what you're doing there, or to know what's happening *to* you when you're on the network, we need to have a handle on what those who design and manage it are doing. This is where the openness and transparency of broadband infrastructure come in.

Nay-sayers claim that the open Internet dialogue is “a solution in search of a problem.” But how far do you have to look to understand that more and more of the network is controlled by fewer and fewer big-time players, much like what we saw happen with traditional media? And *that* experience makes me worry about similar harms being inflicted on new media. Should we have no interest or concern about strategies that combine distribution and content on the Internet? Can you tell me that minority and women's voices on the Internet are getting through to major audiences—*really being heard*—like the big corporate sites? Should we just take it for granted that the small “d” democratic potential of new information technologies will somehow be magically realized without questions being raised about how they are designed and managed? Openness begins with transparency, but from what I can see right now, closed doors are blocking our view. And before going on, let me be clear about this—the open Internet discussion I want to see is *not* about content regulation—it is about the freedom to go to the legal content of your choice. And going forward, it's also about getting a shot at actually being heard.

It's important stuff. It's about making sure our communications and information infrastructure serves our democracy. It's about prying open doors of opportunity—broadband opportunity, yes, but fundamental economic and social opportunity—for all. It's about finally putting behind us those gaps of race and wealth and class and gender that have held so many back for so long. What must be at the very epicenter of the new ecosystem are openness, transparency and freedom. So let's begin there. Let's work together united in commitment to as much openness and freedom as the ecosystem will allow—and I suspect that's a lot more than we currently have.

I just don't “get” that somehow it's wrong-headed to worry about discrimination on the Net. I don't “get” that there should be no concern about writing blank checks to allow

companies to decide all for themselves, deep down beyond where anyone else is ever allowed to look, what is legitimate for them to do and what is not. I work in what is supposed to be—and is on the track to again become—a consumer protection agency. Its mission is not to hear no evil and see no evil—if it ever comes to that, we’ll be doing evil.

I also want to briefly note that having an open Internet applies not just here at home, but it’s something we want to encourage around the world. I would commend to your attention what Secretary of State Clinton said so eloquently in her truly remarkable speech a few weeks ago: “On their own, new technologies do not take sides in the struggle for freedom and progress. But the United States does. We stand for a single Internet where all of humanity has equal access to knowledge and ideas. And we recognize that the world’s information infrastructure will become what we and others make of it.”

Coming back now to our own country and to the more immediate discussion, I was pleased that Chairman Genachowski decided early in his tenure to launch a proceeding on the Open Internet—formerly and inelegantly referred to as Net Neutrality. It’s central to the ecosystem I’ve been talking about. Everyone in this room should be pulling together to make it happen. Let me put it plainly—no one will benefit more from the opportunities of open networks than those who have suffered lack of opportunity for generations. Anyone looking to open the doors of opportunity, to foster digital inclusiveness, and to make the availability of modern telecommunications a right of all Americans needs to be on-board on this issue. It would be a lost opportunity of historic and tragic proportion for diversity groups and civil rights organizations to join forces, even inadvertently, with those whose endgame has nothing to do with creating the kind of open and transparent networks the country needs. This is the time for those who believe in expanding opportunity to pull together, not to pull apart.

Finally, a quick word on another, sometimes overlooked, component of the new information technology ecosystem. I noted with great interest the Joint Center’s finding that “keep[ing] up with the news” was one of the primary online activities cited by the non-adopters when considering what they would do online. A higher percentage, I might add, than those who said they would go online to shop! Our civic dialogue will increasingly take root and grow in the digital realm. The future town square will be paved with broadband bricks. This is why I have made it a priority to emphasize the importance of news, information and civic engagement in the scope of our forthcoming broadband plan.

You know, happy outcomes on the Internet are not guaranteed and nothing here is on auto-pilot. There are some who say “don’t worry, new media will take care of itself.” But Mrs. Clinton is right: it will be what we make of it. Watchdog reporting and quality journalism don’t just tweet out of thin air. Just as previous information infrastructure build-outs, from newspapers to broadcast, were guided by visionary public policy to ensure that citizens would have the news and information they needed to make informed decisions, so must we ensure that the new information infrastructure serves this large and all-American purpose today. Our democracy relies on a well-informed citizenry and this transition we are in right now needs to be handled with great care. Even while we contemplate how to make sure the new ecosystem sustains—and hopefully enhances—the news and information citizens need, we must understand the forces that did such damage to present-day news media. And let’s not be cavalier in writing off traditional

media as quaint relics of a bygone era. Even as the migration to digital media begins, experts tell us that the overwhelming bulk of news and information—probably in the area of three-quarters of it—originates with present-day newspapers and TV stations. So we need to come to grips with *present-day media challenges* because that’s where most of our present-day news is coming from and will continue coming from, perhaps for years. Fortunately for you, we don’t have time for me to talk about the many bad private-sector and public-sector decisions that accelerated the decline of newspaper and broadcast news, but I do hope we will pay them the attention they deserve even while we are pondering the migration to digital. Under Chairman Genachowski’s leadership, the Commission recently issued a Public Notice entitled “The Future of Media and Information Needs of Communities in a Digital Age.” It affords us the chance to act on these questions—the sooner the better, as far as I’m concerned. I hope the Joint Center, and everyone here, will respond to the questions raised in the Public Notice.

Already citizens have begun to weigh in about this on our website. From Los Angeles: “Our local media is dying. We need to preserve local ownership.” From Newark, Delaware: “Need more voices. More unbiased media outlets. More jobs in media.” From South Lake Tahoe: “We need more local, real news.” The people get it; we need to get it, too.

All these issues are tough issues, no question. I don’t pretend there are a lot of easy answers. But, at their core, they’re not new and unprecedented either. The challenge to build broad information infrastructure and to guarantee the flow of news and information all across the land long predates broadband. It’s actually a very old challenge. Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and James Madison put it front-and-center. And they figured out ways to get the job done—because they knew their fragile new democracy depended on it. Today our technology is new, but our democratic challenge is exactly the same—to build an information infrastructure that meets the needs of the people. Universal broadband, an open Internet, and robust journalism must all come together as we write the next great chapter of America.

Thank you.