

Prepared Remarks of FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn

Introduction to the Panel

“Wireless Spectrum Needs: What is the Best Way to Serve All of the American People?”

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Thank you, Kimberly, for that gracious introduction and for your kind invitation. Rainbow PUSH has a long and distinguished history of advocating for those Americans who are not afforded the same legal, financial, and social benefits that others in our Nation enjoy.

I proudly join Rainbow PUSH in this mission – of being a voice for the voiceless. During my relatively brief time at the FCC, I have made it my mission to ensure that those who have not traditionally had a seat at the table, get one. I believe that I was given the opportunity to serve as the first-ever African American female on the Commission in order to provide a conduit to and from the government for all those people who so desperately need one. It is essential for each and every American to have access to the information they need, and to have their point of view represented during the decision-making process.

I have also made a point of trying to help the Commission extend its sphere beyond the Beltway. Federal agencies naturally gravitate towards the same parties who appear before them on a regular basis; parties who are familiar with the ways of Washington. But that approach is far too narrow if we are to be successful in doing what’s best for the American people. We must spread our wings and share and learn from all corners of our Nation, and tackle the issues that matter most to Americans from all walks of life.

The topic of today's panel, "Wireless Spectrum Needs: What is the Best Way to Serve All of the American People?" is as timely as it is complex.

The thirst for spectrum for mobile needs is a relatively new one. Sure, spectrum has always been considered "scarce." But never quite in the way it is today. What is driving the current spectrum conversation is fairly new: wireless broadband service.

Broadband has transformed our Nation and the world. It has opened doors that just a few short years ago we never thought possible. You can look at pretty much every sector of our economy, and it is now being shaped and reshaped by broadband.

Take healthcare, for example. I have had the opportunity to see some of the most innovative telemedicine programs in action. These endeavors allow men and women in remote areas of the country to receive timely and the most expert care that had once been out of reach. Not only does this come into play at times of emergency through remote diagnoses, but even more importantly, broadband connections allow an array of preventative services to stave off significant health problems.

Education is another area impacted by broadband. Broadband enables classrooms to be mobile. Whereas specialty classes – especially in foreign languages – were once available only in the richest school districts, a student in a remote area of downstate Illinois can now learn from the same teacher at the prestigious Northside College Prep here in Chicago.

And let us not forget about the basics, like government services and employment opportunities. Without access to broadband, you are at a huge disadvantage in the job market. Not only can you no longer apply for most Fortune 500 company jobs with a paper and pen, but even researching employment opportunities and preparing for interviews now effectively requires high-speed Internet access.

Government services are hardly different. While most of them are still available through a hard-copy process, your service will be far more expedient if you can fill out and submit your forms on line.

Those examples highlight why broadband access is indispensable. but what role does *wireless* broadband play specifically? It may not be entirely obvious. In one sense, a major focus of the FCC's recent National Broadband Plan was wired networks. As things stand today, wired networks generally provide faster speeds and more reliable service than wireless ones. This is why the Plan is concerned in the first instance with finding ways to encourage all Americans to get on line *at home*.

We cannot minimize, however, the incredible growth of wireless networks. It has been remarkable. Seemingly overnight they have transformed from providing voice-only services to serving as fairly robust broadband connections. The iPhone alone seems to have rocketed us light years ahead on the mobile front.

So while mobile broadband may not yet be on par with wireline service, it is becoming increasingly clear that its explosion may give us a reasonable alternative as we move forward. It is therefore important to think about what advantages mobile broadband can deliver – including cost, reach, and convenience – and how to best make use of them.

This is the point at which the debate over spectrum begins. Wireless broadband service requires more and better spectrum to deliver at the speeds and quality necessary to offer a quality broadband experience for consumers. Networks that are constrained limit the ability of the user to have a meaningful mobile experience. Moreover, additional spectrum could foster more competition in the wireless space, which in turn could yield more affordable prices.

As we discuss how to deploy more spectrum, there are a few crucial issues that I believe our panel must address. First, where does the broadcast spectrum fit in to the equation? Television broadcasters occupy a large swath of prime spectrum, and they have for many years. The National Broadband Plan recommends, among other things, that Congress authorize the FCC to hold a voluntary broadcast spectrum auction, wherein broadcasters can voluntarily relinquish their licenses for all or part of their spectrum, in exchange for a portion of the proceeds from the auction.

There are a number of potential landmines underlying this proposal, but one certainly worth our attention today is the effect of such an auction on broadcast diversity. It seems to me that the most likely candidates for a broadcast spectrum sell-off are minority owners. This group – making up only three percent of all television broadcasters – is already on the endangered list. Any further reduction in their ranks would be devastating.

It is important to note that by raising this concern, in no way, shape, or form, am I suggesting that the proposal is dead on arrival. I am merely raising what I believe to be an important and missing piece of the conversation. In addition, I sincerely hope that broadcasters who have not actively supported diversity in ownership in the past do not now use my focus on this issue as a pretext to undermine the proposal. But for those of us who spend a great deal of time struggling with the lamentable state of minority – and women – ownership in the broadcast world, this is an important concern to discuss.

Second, I am interested in thinking through what emphasis we should place on mobile broadband vis-à-vis the FCC's existing push for broadband adoption in the home. That is, whether mobile broadband is an acceptable option in and of itself for those who have not yet adopted at home. Or is it a potential gateway to home use and thus an integral part of the overall adoption strategy?

These questions are particularly pertinent in the context of broadband adoption among African Americans and Hispanics. If there is one technological area where African Americans and Hispanics have excelled, it is *mobile* adoption. As for mobile broadband, while African Americans and Hispanics trail the national averages in home broadband adoption – 59% for African Americans and 49% for Hispanics compared to an average of 65% for all Americans – a greater percentage of both groups access the Internet via mobile devices. According to an FCC study released earlier this year, African Americans and Hispanics both outpace the national average for mobile Internet use by nearly 10 percentage points.

This is not to say that many African Americans and Hispanics have gone mobile in lieu of broadband access at home. As the FCC study found, among African-Americans

who have gone online with their mobile device, 78 percent have broadband at home. For African Americans without broadband at home, 20 percent have used the Internet on their handheld devices compared to nine percent of all non-adopters. These numbers do suggest, however, that for some, mobile broadband is acting as a substitute for home adoption.

A third area of interest to me is the provider side of the equation. As we roll out more spectrum to auction across the board, what role will minority businesses play? I recently expressed my dismay over conflicting signals that are given out by the FCC and DOJ as to what kinds of bidders the federal government is seeking when it comes to conditions on spectrum reallocation. The concern is what happens to the spectrum that is being auctioned. Are we going to continue to see spectrum go to the largest providers? Or are there meaningful opportunities to be had for small and underrepresented businesses in this high-growth field? This aspect of the spectrum conversation cannot be ignored.

There is no doubt I could throw out many more observations and questions within this fascinating area, but it is time for me to give Adrienne the spotlight she deserves. I appreciate Rainbow PUSH for inviting me to this terrific event and I look forward to hearing the panelists solve all of my problems for me. Thank you.