

Statement of Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn
Tuesday, December 13, 2011

Re: *The final FCC Open Meeting for Commissioner Michael Copps*

When I arrived at the Commission two and a half years ago, I suddenly made a lot of “new friends”. Wonderful people, all of them, but there was one who especially stood out. Michael Copps has been a prominent presence in Washington for some time, but his connection to and love for a particular state in the union got my attention on day one, and that blending of DC savvy and southern graces has had a profound effect on me ever since. He’s part professor, part watchful critic, part sage, but is all friend, all mentor, and all public servant.

He came to the Commission in the Spring of 2001, and after September of that year, it was clear that our nation’s telecommunications networks needed to undergo major changes in response to major threats. Our first responders needed better interoperability, and Michael Copps fought – and continues to fight – for them.

He was integral to the DTV transition, and his guiding hand assisted in conducting a massive shift with regard to one of the scariest places imaginable – the space between people and their television sets. When I was nominated to be a Commissioner, one of the first things I did was try to find out more about Acting Chairman Copps, and although his three most important priorities at the time were “DTV, DTV and DTV,” he helped to navigate that shift and so much more.

As we heard at the last Commission meeting, he initiated a rulemaking proceeding to spur the deployment of new wireless medical services that could bring great breakthroughs to the more than 50 million Americans who are suffering from paralysis. He also issued the Rural Broadband Report and initiated the National Broadband Plan proceeding.

Commissioner Copps has consistently provides a voice to the voiceless, and I have been fortunate enough to see this advocacy in person. Just two weeks ago in Atlanta, at our final road forum together, I watched him bring a crowd to its feet after a passionate speech about the public interest obligations owed to all Americans, and how the FCC is their protector. In every speech he gives, to use a sports analogy, Michael Copps leaves it all on the field. He speaks from his heart, but more significantly, he speaks to the hearts and minds of the American consumer. He is uncompromising in that regard, as are all true champions.

His dedication to this agency and its work is unquestionable. He arrives before the rooster crows. He has accomplished more each day before most of us have finished our first cup of coffee. He also attends more meetings in one day than most people attend in a week. In fact, he even attends Joint Board meetings and once was willing to travel to another city and preside over the Joint Boards when I wasn’t available. I had Angie check our attendance records on the Joint Boards, and he shows up each and every time—no matter the agenda – and wows us with his intimate knowledge on telecom policy and his personal experience on adopting new technologies, such as moving from telegraph messages to party lines to cell phones. He’s recently integrated into his comments his up-to-date Twitter account, which includes his personal encounters with airline attendants who insist that he turn off all of his electronic gadgets before take off. Oh, that wasn’t you? That’s right – it was an actor, not a rock star.

I will dearly miss that great smile, effortless charm, and gentlemanly demeanor which you consistently display during battles, victories and even during disappointments. You have

been a tremendous source of encouragement and comfort to me, and it is hard to imagine how it will be without you here, sitting next to me, lending quiet support and inspiration. But as I have heard you say more than once, you are leaving this post, but not this space, and for that and so much more, I am eternally grateful. We love you Michael Copps. Well done, my friend, well done.