Opening Remarks of Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn
Lincoln University Energy Forum
Chester, Pennsylvania
April 13, 2012

Introduction

Thank you, Commissioner Gardner for that gracious introduction, and for your role in allowing me to participate in this inaugural, and to Lincoln University's incredible new President Dr. Robert Jennings, to the extremely kind and dedicated Dr. Derrick Swinton, to the members of the Board which include long time trustee and state utility commission Chair Robert Powelson, and Ms. Kimberly Lloyd, and to the faculty, staff and most especially to the Mighty Lions of Lincoln. As a proud daughter of civil rights advocates, I consider it an honor to be standing on the grounds of the first chartered historically black university.

Commissioner Gardner mentioned this incredible opportunity President Obama afforded me through this nomination on the Federal Communications Commission. But as a person who ran an African American oriented weekly newspaper for 14 years, prior to serving 11 years as a utility commissioner in South Carolina, allow me to take some editorial liberties during my inaugural opening minutes by using the theme: **Don't Simply Rely on the Headlines**.

On this stage, you will find accomplished individuals who, in their own way, achieved historical firsts in fields once out of reach to African American professionals. But, here they are with titles and authority unheard of just a short time ago. And, even without knowing some for much more than a day, I am comfortable in stating that there is one thread that they have in common. They delayed the quick gratification that many of their peers were attracted to in order to afford the greater benefits that they are realizing today. They failed to be sidetracked by those many destructive temptations that their friends were driven to, so they didn't have to explain those blemishes on their resumes or record. While others had lots of fun, in some interesting ways and in some incredible places, they studied long and hard to distinguish themselves in school and at work. But, the most important common characteristic I think you will find is that they refused to let those obstacles that will also come our way to get in the way of their destiny.

But too often, the headlines of today don't reflect those personal and professional sacrifices and stories of victories and accomplishments within our communities. And too often, because of the absence of those types of headlines, many of us fail to realize just how sweet and rewarding these sacrifices truly are and just how many success stories there are to be told.

I work at an agency where communications policies, overlap with energy policy, offering some exciting career opportunities for all of you, in a host of fields open to you, if you don't, simply rely, on those current headlines.

The Federal Communications Commission

Congress established the Federal Communications Commission when it enacted the Communications Act of 1934. That gave the FCC the authority to regulate interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite and cable in 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. possessions. At full complement, I am one-fifth of the Commissioners who set communications policies in this nation. Today, since we have only three members, I am one-third of that body.

The FCC is organized into seven operating Bureaus and ten Staff Offices. Although every Bureau and Office serves important roles, there are four that seem to get the most attention. The Media Bureau regulates AM, FM radio and television broadcast stations, such as ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX and WDAS, Power 99 and 100.3. It also has some regulatory authority over cable television and satellite services, such as Comcast and DirecTV.

The Wireless Telecommunications Bureau oversees the cell phone services you receive from companies such as AT&T, Sprint, and T-Mobile, and the Wireline Bureau is responsible for rules and policies concerning traditional telephone companies like Frontier, Verizon, and traditional cable companies that are in the landline telephone business like Time Warner.

The Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau oversees policies that help maintain communications, during times of large scale disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, and initiates policies to help consumers communicate with local law enforcement or public safety agencies, during personal crises.

The FCC is one of the most influential federal agencies you rarely read about, unless there is a wardrobe malfunction or an obscene gesture during the Super Bowl, or really bad language spoken during an awards show. But did you know that the communications industry in this country is valued at about one-sixth of our gross national product? And our influence has only grown, since the early 1990s, with the advent of the Internet and the ever growing demand for mobile phone service. And all of you know about Comcast, gaining a 51% share of NBC Universal last year, right? Our agency reviewed that merger to determine if it would serve the public interest.

The FCC also has an important impact on industries other than communications. For example, in February 2009, Congress enacted the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Among other things, that ARRA directed the FCC to develop a National Broadband Plan to advance several specific national policy interests, and address how greater deployment and adoption of broadband, can improve economic opportunity, education, health care, public safety, and energy efficiency.

In the area of energy policy, the Plan devoted much attention, to the way that broadband infrastructure can aid the deployment of smart grid technologies, and it makes a number of recommendations for all relevant private and public stakeholders that fall into two broad categories.

The first includes recommendations that provide flexibility to utility companies to find the right communications network, to deploy Smart Grid technologies that best suits their needs. The Plan recognizes that commercial wireless networks are being used for many Smart Grid applications, particularly metering and routine sensing systems.

The second category includes those that seek to empower consumers by giving them access to real time information about their energy use. Traditionally, consumers have been passive recipients of energy. They typically only interact with their energy providers to pay a monthly bill and report service quality problems. As a result of this limited involvement, consumers have little insight into how their day-to-day activities impact their energy bills.

If we want the Smart Grid to promote energy efficiency as much as possible, then we need our consumers to participate much more in energy management and conservation. Why is this important?

The National Broadband Plan estimates that, by simply providing you with better information about your energy use, your total consumption will be reduced between 5–15%. That equates to a savings of $60–180 per year for the average American household. Therefore, it is in all of our best interests to create incentives for consumers to participate willingly, in the solutions for energy management, and simple, easy-to-use products and services will give them that greater choice and more control.

The deployment and adoption of smart grid technologies could have a profound beneficial impact and provide a host of opportunities for those in this room, in the areas of manufacturing and installation of meters, relays, switching gear, and other hardware products. Translation: Entrepreneurial opportunities and business ownership. Creating and installing this technology will require a multi-disciplined, labor-intensive effort that will create jobs in perpetuity.

In 2010, Assistant Secretary for Manufacturing and Services Nicole Y. Lamb-Hale, from the U.S. Department of Commerce, estimated that the smart grid could help to reduce power demand by 20 percent, and would lead to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, as well as give the opportunity to develop a highly innovative sector of the economy, creating new and high-skilled jobs. The Recovery Act smart grid investments alone are projected to directly create 43,000 jobs and support another 61,000 in the private sector.

Career Advice

Commissioner Gardner asked, if I had a son or daughter graduating from Lincoln University this year, would I encourage him or her to seek a career at the FCC and if so in what area. The answer is absolutely, but with conditions.

First, it is very rewarding working at places like the FCC because, as I mentioned, the Commission often makes policy decisions with such national significance. Some of the issues we tackle are difficult, because stakeholders have substantial interests that compete with each other. We often are required to carefully balance the interests of consumers with those of state and local governments, as well as those of large multi-billion dollar corporations. But the lessons you learn by helping Commissioners, like me, address these challenging policy issues will give you problem solving skills that should help in any career path.

And while I must admit that many permanent staff members, at the FCC, have graduate degrees in law, engineering, and economics, fewer than half of the almost 1,800 current employees at the FCC, are lawyers, engineers, or economists. Eighty-One employees investigate potential violations of our rules. There are almost 90 program analysts that help us administer projects that help us address consumer concerns. More than 50 industry analysts provide detailed data about the markets we regulate, and there are congressional liaison specialists, who help us, respond to inquiries from those powerful Senators and Congressmen.

There are also important positions in administrative areas in that more than 65 employees are in the budget and accounting, and you will find about 180 Information Technology Specialists and technology assistants, who we could not do without.

I said with conditions, because if you are interested in a career in the communications industry, but are having a difficult time finding openings at the FCC, consider openings at other federal agencies, state and local governments, and private companies that either work with the

FCC or work on issues related to communications policies. And consider taking unpaid or lower paid internships if you can. There are a number of employees at the FCC that began their communications careers elsewhere, many who started as interns. And the communications space is relatively small. So if you are good, you will be noticed, and sought after.

But since we are primarily focusing on energy today—though you could not operate any of these systems without a solid communications and technology platform, let me close by encouraging you to look at the other utility industries. The numbers in the electric and natural gas utility industry were a little over 525,000 last year. Of those employees, 42% are Engineers, Line workers, Technicians, Plant and Field Operators. And at the associations representing energy utility companies, you will find Regulatory Analysts, Tariff and Rate Analysts, as well as Finance and Accounting professionals.

Conclusion

Some of our fields fail to get the attention they deserve, because it's hard to write flashy headlines about smart grid, environmental justice and high speed Internet deployment, and it takes more than 30 seconds to explain their impact during a traditional broadcast segment. But, these professions are among the most recession proof you will find, because no matter how tough things get economically, we will always demand comfort in our homes and in office—that means energy. Also, we can not spend more than a few moments without checking on our mobile devices, because will always text or talk—that means technical and managerial support. I am looking forward to joining the panel discussion after our presentations, and speaking with you more about how to make those headlines read as they should, and making you the subject.