

**STATEMENT OF  
COMMISSIONER MIGNON L. CLYBURN**

Re: *ONAP Presentation and Annual Report (March 20, 2013).*

Thank you Geoff and Irene for that illuminating report on how the Commission, through the Office of Native Affairs and Policy, is better serving Tribal Nations and Native communities. I join my colleagues in acknowledging Senator Udall's great work on these issues. Thank you for coming today Senator to speak with us about your efforts. It is through collaboration with our leaders in Congress that we can best effect change and improve the outcomes for all. It has truly been an honor to work with you and your staff as we consider and implement policies designed to improve communications services for Tribal Nations and Native communities. I look forward to our ongoing engagement.

ONAP's mission to engage in robust government-to-government consultation and assist the Commission in developing and implementing policies for bringing modern communications infrastructure and services to all Tribal Nations and Native communities is critical, and what is apparent from this presentation is that while ONAP's and the Commission's initial work has been extremely productive, we still have a long way to go. Tribal Nations and Native communities have traditionally had significantly less access to communications services than the rest of the U.S., and while we have taken very proactive steps to address the wide gaps, we must stay diligent and continue to implement those policies already adopted. We must also press forward in concluding those potentially beneficial proceedings. I encourage you and ONAP's continual aid in this effort by helping us prioritize the work that the Tribal Nations and Native communities, in your consultations, have noted would best deliver to them those much needed services.

We should all be pleased to hear of the opportunities that our USF and Lifeline reforms have afforded some Tribes, offering better coverage and enhanced quality of service. The Tribal Mobility Fund Phase I will soon be underway, and ONAP's engagement with Tribal Nations and Native communities in preparation for this opportunity is critically important. I have great hope today that more Tribal lands will receive 3G or better wireless service as a result, and I am heartened by the introduction of new radio stations serving Tribal Nations and Native communities. Hearing news, music, and commentary in one's native tongue is priceless, especially during times of natural disasters and when information for the communities' citizens is needed for saving and improving lives.

Last Friday, I spoke about the importance of the Commission's Lifeline program, which provides telecommunications access to approximately 15 million low-income households in the U.S. For those families, this assistance means that they don't have to choose between eating or having access to 911, job opportunities, and their loved ones. And for those residing on Tribal lands, Lifeline offers assistance to approximately 690,000 families. Why do I mention that here? Typically, these families live in very remote areas where a phone call bridges the gap of many miles, sometimes up to 50 miles or more, between their homes and villages. While it is very important for the Commission to continue to be diligent in the implementation of its Lifeline reform to address waste, fraud, and abuse, we must never lose sight of our obligation to ensure that consumers who have followed the rules and are eligible for the service are not denied a dial tone. This is especially important for Tribal Nations and Native communities which already face many other obstacles when it comes to communicating.

Thank you again, Geoff and ONAP, for your presentation and the delivery of your annual report. I look forward to our ongoing collaboration on ways to best serve all Tribal Nations and Native communities.