Remarks of FCC Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn
The International Women's Hackathon
Washington, DC
April 22, 2014

Good afternoon everyone! I am so excited to join you as we kick off the second International Women's Hackathon!   I want to thank to Microsoft Research and the National Center for Women and Information Technology for inviting me to be with you today.

This year's Hackathon is organized around creating a website or application will provide information on one of two important issues: "Teens and Distracted Driving" or "Encouraging More Women in STEM." Both are challenging, but worthy of attention because they are preventable and doable. In 2012, 3,328 people were killed and an estimated additional 421,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes involving a distracted driver.

We often speak about how too few women are represented in professional STEM jobs. In 2011, women made up only 26% of the STEM workforce, 2% more than 2009.

I.   **Why Do STEM?**

So that's progress right? Given that the trend is moving in the right direction, why the attention or, more pointedly, why does it really matter if women delve into fields that many consider non-traditional? Well, three words ring loudly for me at this juncture: jobs, opportunities and growth. Although the total number of jobs in the United States will grow an estimated 10 percent between 2008 and 2018, the number of STEM jobs is projected to grow by 17%. There will be 2.4 million job vacancies for STEM workers through 2018 and the unemployment rate for those with a master's or Ph.D. in a STEM discipline is below 3.5%. The current national unemployment rate is 6.7%.

So I say yes. We need young women to be prepared to fill these jobs. And we need to send the message that we can and want to fill these jobs. That is the main goal of this Hackathon, to show young women, even those who currently have little or no computer science experience that they can develop a technology based solution in almost any field they endeavor. I am overjoyed that so many of you are taking important, first steps: learning and using skills this weekend to prepare for the opportunities that await.

STEM helps us solve problems, bridges divides, aids us in making real differences in our communities… STEM changes the world.

Whether you create a mobile app that educates on distractive driving or create a website to encourage more women in STEM, you are using technology to drive social change and maybe even bridge divides. I have seen the power of ICT collaboration, its impact and how technology is being used across the world to transform other nations and their economies.

In Sri Lanka, the Ceylon School for the Deaf and Blind is helping those too often overlooked. The TRY Oyster Women's Association in The Gambia, brings together 500 female oyster harvesters from 15 villages through their network. In Ghana and Senegal, they are using simple flip phones to check market prices so they get the best returns on their harvest.

II.   How to Survive in STEM: Get and Give Support

This brings me to another point: Support. You need support to remain encouraged, support to navigate along the pipeline from grade school to university to employment or entrepreneurship. Unfortunately, that pipeline gets leaky for too many women and girls opt-out of STEM at critical points during their education or career.

For example, women hold about 20% of bachelor degrees in engineering in the United States, but make up about 11% of the engineering workforce. And research shows that support networks —especially mentors — can help keep women in the STEM game. Support networks were incredibly important for me and as a woman I try to model myself accordingly.

This weekend while you are learning important technical skills by collaborating in teams, start building those support networks right. They are invaluable.

And luckily for all of you technologies make that easier. ICTs allow us to stay in touch regardless of the distance, and there are few excuses with smart phones and tablets and email, Skype, and instant messaging.

III.   Life Skills

Support and collaboration are important life skills outside of STEM too. Getting things done and making an impact requires compromise and collaboration, whether in a company, non-profit, or even the government.   In fact, last fall it was a bi-partisan group of women Senators that negotiated and led the compromise to raise the debt ceiling and end the U.S. government shutdown. The final bi-partisan group was 14 people -- 6 of whom were women. That is remarkable because women comprise only 20% of the entire Senate.

All this affirms that women make great leaders, and our roles across all industries need to reflect that. Did you know that only 7% of Fortune 500 tech companies are headed by women and about 49% of publicly traded information technology companies have NO WOMEN on their boards? That needs to be fixed and you are the ones who can make that happen.

IV.   Closing

When I was growing up, my parents would always say that we are the sum total of our experiences… Sage advice that I hope you take to heart. What I took from them is that I should work on being more well-rounded, that I should seize opportunities, take risks, and embrace challenges and that the things which often challenged me made me a better woman, a better leader, a better friend and a better mentor.

I am inspired that, so early in your lives, you are embracing these challenges—you are participating in this Hackathon, and are pursuing STEM careers.

And yes, the challenges you take on may seem hard now, but they will make you brighter, stronger and better, and will open up opportunities for you and others going forward.

Beyoncé says it best: "Girls run the world." I can't wait to see how much greater things will be when you take it over!