

Remarks of Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn
Walter Kaitz Foundation
New York, NY
September 17, 2014

Accepting the Diversity Advocate Award

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and colleagues, thank you for this magnificent honor. I want you to know that I do not take this award lightly, especially as I reflect on the foundation's namesake and the extraordinary commitment he had for inclusion.

To my friend, Chairman Michael Powell, thank you for your leadership and continued support. And to all of you assembled tonight, I am both humbled and moved to be recognized tonight. The last time I looked up the word "advocate", it was defined as: a person who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause or policy. A champion, upholder, promoter, proponent, campaigner, fighter and crusader.

Perhaps the most significant thing about this year's "Diversity Advocate" award, Dr. David Porter, is the journey; the steps and the opportunities you and I have been allowed to reflect on our advocacy and reaffirm our purpose. It has pushed me to realize a resolve that I never thought I had, and it has encouraged me to seek solace in rereading one of the most ringing and resounding statements of what public advocacy is all about.

If you want to be important. . . . wonderful.
If you want to be recognized. . . . wonderful.
If you want to be great wonderful.
But recognize, that he who is greatest among you. . . Shall be your servant.
That's the new definition of greatness.
By giving [and dare I add, accepting] that definition of greatness,
It means that everybody can be great,
Because everybody can serve.

That lesson—that quote—from one of the greatest advocates that ever lived, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., tells me that the definition of advocacy should include, perhaps, the word service as well.

So in accepting this award, I further commit to you that I will continue to serve.

I further commit to you that I will continue to pursue fairness and equity for all Americans, no matter how tough it gets.

I further commit to you that I will continue to advocate for a level playing field, no matter how tough the terrain.

And I further commit to you that I will continue to advocate for the rights of anyone who wants to step onto that playing field, regardless of their gender, race, lifestyle, religion, age or orientation.

And I know such lofty goals will not always be easy. And yes, I know that the slings and arrows will always be aimed to strike close to the heart and the hearth.

But I commit to you tonight that I will not turn my back. . . that I will keep fighting the good fight. . . so that at the end of the day, my friends and my foes will be able to say with conviction and certainty, that she was a determined advocate. .. that she was a dedicated servant. . . and that she was a deserving awardee.

Thank you and good evening.