

Prepared Remarks for Commissioner Clyburn
Plenary Session: “Information and Technology: The Key to Global Communication”
Jackson State University
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Good morning everyone! It is great for me to be back in Blue Bengal Tiger country! Allow me to thank the organizers of this conference and especially my friend, LeMia Jenkins, for extending an invitation, for such a gracious welcome, and for that warm introduction.

My six years of service at the FCC and the mission of the Federal Communications Commission, fall right in line with the theme of this morning’s plenary session – “Information and Technology: The Key to Global Communication.” There are many exciting developments in the communications and technology space where the FCC is right in the middle of spurring global communications and opportunities.

About the FCC

I am one of five Commissioners or members on the FCC, which Congress established when it enacted the Communications Act of 1934. Over the years, Congress has enacted new statutes or laws, but all of our authority rests on four basic principles: public safety, consumer protection, competition, and universal service. We oversee various communications services, including voice and data over wireline and wireless or mobile phones and networks, radio broadcasts, and TV service by broadcast, cable, or satellite and much of that influence is international.

And what few realize is that the communications industry is responsible for one-sixth of America’s annual gross domestic product. We review mergers of communications companies ranging from last year’s AT&T-DirecTV merger to the pending Charter-Time Warner Cable deal, which are valued at billions of dollars. The FCC also manages a valuable resource called the radio magnetic spectrum which fuels your mobile devices. If we were to look back some 17 years ago, the primary users of this spectrum were radio and TV stations. Since then, the FCC has taken action to make available new spectrum to respond to the demand to allow all your mobile devices to operate.

Industry Efforts to Spur Global Communication

For years, we have realized that access to the Internet is essential to spur global communications. And in 2009, the President signed a law that mandated the FCC to come up with a National Broadband Plan, which we published in March of 2010. This Plan concluded that broadband or high speed Internet, had the potential to create jobs and bring other tremendous benefits to communities large and small, as well as our entire economy. But for this vision to become a reality, the FCC, other federal agencies, state and local governments, and private industry needed to take several steps to bring about greater infrastructure deployment as well as the adoption of both wired and wireless broadband networks.

For example, the Plan recommended that we update what is known as our universal service programs where we distribute funding to support networks with broadband capable services that are more affordable for communities, including low-income households.

And since the release of the National Broadband Plan, we have seen tremendous innovation and investment in landline and mobile broadband products, services, and networks. Apple introduced the first wireless tablet in early 2010 and, according to the Pew Research Center, 45 percent of Americans now have wireless tablets. Worldwide, almost 207 million tablets were sold in 2015 alone.

We are also seeing many more wearable mobile and health products. FitBit or Samsung wrist watches, not only tell you the time, but map out your steps, let you know how many calories you have burned and much, much more. All of those products, like wearables and other mobile technology, use spectrum. You may have heard about machine-2-machine communications or the Internet of Things, where from your smartphone or watch, or your computer, you can control the temperature in your home, turn off lights, lock doors and windows or start the car.

And it is not just about us, but the entire world is on board. A few months ago, I had the privilege of attending the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, Spain, and saw massive displays of the latest mobile applications. I also heard about business models to connect low income communities, all over the globe, to the Internet. A satellite company called OneWeb, hopes, in the next few years, to use a satellite constellation to address the most demanding global connectivity challenges and sudden infrastructure crises such as during national disasters, when consumers are often abruptly cut off from Internet access.

At the FCC, we understand that all communities need and deserve affordable access to the Internet for those smartphones, tablets, and other mobile devices. So we have adopted a number of measure to ensure consumers have access to the Internet, no matter where they live, by making major changes to the Universal Service Fund program, to better connect rural and high cost areas with fixed broadband and better mobile phone coverage.

Once the Internet is available, however, we need to ensure it is an open platform to encourage investment and innovation. This is why I was proud to support the FCC's action to ensure a free and open Internet in early 2015. The world refers to this as Net Neutrality, but I like to say that we adopted clear rules to prevent conduct that would harm an open platform. These protections are important to ensure that consumers will continue to enjoy unfettered access to the content they want to see over the Internet.

The fundamental principle behind Open Internet, is that consumers should decide; not the government, and not the company that happens to provide broadband service to a particular consumer, what you can access over the Internet. As one of our greatest civil rights pioneers, Representative John Lewis said so eloquently: "If we had the Internet during the [civil rights] movement, we could have done more, much more, to bring people together from all around the country, to organize and work together, to build the beloved community. That is why it is so important for us to protect the Internet. Every voice matters and we cannot let the interests of profit silence the voices of those pursuing human dignity." And giving a voice to those that have traditionally not been heard, is something I am very passionate about.

FCC Efforts to Spur Global Communications

The current Chairman of the FCC, Tom Wheeler, has become known for using the phrase "competition, competition, competition," because we hear him repeat it so often. Well, I have a phrase of my own: community, community, community. In communities all across this nation - be they urban or suburban, rural or Tribal - there is a communications divide. Before I go on, can I have a show of hands if you have heard of the term "digital divide"? This is where there is no advanced or high tech investments or services and/or communities either cannot afford or companies choose not to invest resources like they do in richer areas. This divide is really visible, when it comes to broadband access, affordability and infrastructure; and when it comes to the speeds necessary to take advantage, of all the Internet has to offer.

Throughout my career in public service, I have focused on closing this divide. Be it the Lifeline Program designed for low income families so they can afford telephone service and soon broadband, or

fighting for better rates for families and friends to stay in touch with their loved ones in jails and prisons – my goal is to bring communities closer together, bridge the communications divide, and represent, with a seat at the table, the voices and concerns of those who have been traditionally ignored or are left behind.

Today, broadband or high speed Internet, is a major bridge to a world-class education. For the elderly and disabled, broadband provides a means to connect to friends and family, engage in community activities, and pursue educational, communications, and healthcare opportunities, tailor-made to their needs. For those entering the workforce or who have lost their jobs, broadband can be used to find employment or entrepreneurial resources that would never appear in the newspaper’s classified section. But for broadband to reach its fullest potential, to improve the lives of each of our citizens, it must be both affordable and available to all — for if it is not, it will become just another barrier, that separates the “haves” from the “have nots.”

While a great deal of work is still required, I am pleased to report that we have already made reforms, to better ensure that low-income Americans, can access the vital communications technologies, they need. As I mentioned, our commitment to expanding access, is not limited to the United States. At the FCC, we are also pleased to support the U.S. Department of State’s “Global Connect” initiative that launched last Fall. It aims to bring an additional 1.5 billion people online by 2020 and further extend the economic and social benefits of connectivity to those who remain without access.

Prepare For Your Future

Now prior to being appointed to the FCC, I served 11 years on the South Carolina Public Service Commission. In that role, I became familiar with communications regulation, though I was focused more on energy and water. Before that, I was the general manager of a local weekly newspaper. During my professional career, I have worked in three fairly different fields. But, what I have learned, is that certain character traits are needed to be successful no matter what you do, if part of your mission is to make a difference.

Moral courage. You have to be strong enough to stick to your principles, even if it might be against your self-interest, and even if it may make it more difficult to accomplish your goals.

Passion. All of us get excited about something. It might be about sports, music, art, or food. Some of us, I have been told, even get passionate about accounting and science. I am not really one of those people. When you are excited and proud of what you do, it makes it easier to do what is necessary to stick to your principles, overcome obstacles, and accomplish your goals.

Perseverance. To me, perseverance is not giving up even when things get difficult or success is delayed or not in plain sight. The inmate calling reforms, which is still not done after over 10 years, represent an example of an issue where I would not give up and continue to persevere, despite resistance from the established players.

Preparedness. To prepare to succeed in your career, you should carefully examine what you have learned and done, and compare it to the skills you need, to succeed in the job you want. In my current job, it is being able to review a highly technical policy document, and quickly identify how this might help, not harm competition and ultimately benefit consumers. For those of you in the audience, who are about to graduate, never be afraid to ask yourself some difficult questions: How do you assess what you are worth? What is your coursework worth? What are your grades worth? Are you ready, are you being prepared, for what the world needs here at Jackson State, your university or your high school? Have you taken workshops, classes on business etiquette? What relationships have you leveraged?

And last, and this one is I believe, the most difficult to come to terms with when it comes to advice: To not always worry about being the one to take or get the credit, even if you are the one responsible for its success. Indira Gandhi, the only female Prime Minister ever to have served in Indian, is known to have said, “There are two kinds of people, those who do the work and those who take the credit. Try to be in the first group; there is less competition there.”

The Promise of Technology

In today's world, technology and culture are key drivers of consumer behavior. These are critical in the communications sector where emotions, culture, preferences, and control all play a part in how companies market to us all. Once marginalized multicultural lifestyles are now embraced and the necessity to appeal to many Americans across all categories and backgrounds has widened.

This means that the frontier for young professionals and their capacity not only to provide the means of entertainment and communications, but also the means to economically transform personal lives and those of your communities, is broad and endless.

I heard the story of a 22-year-old African American college graduate in New York City. He wanted to work for a technology company, but was not successful in landing a job after graduation. So he took a temporary job as a night doorman at a residential building. He has a great personality and got to know the building's residents. One resident was a prominent filmmaker who arranged for meetings with several technology companies for this young man. That 22 year old's company developed an app that helps people call for and pay for a suite of concierge services. Eighteen months later, this temporary night doorman, exited his company, with \$25 million in the bank.

I share this story because each of you has the potential to identify and address, an unmet need in your community or around the globe, develop a concept, an app or a solution, and solve long-standing problems. You may or may not be \$25 million richer in 18 months, but you never know unless you try. Not everyone at this huge high tech companies are engineers, scientists or technologists. Many are creators and innovators with ideas and partners who assist them in areas of expertise where they, themselves, may be lacking.

Each of you is talented, capable, and worthy of seizing and realizing your fullest potential and it is the job of those in government like me, to focus on making those possibilities open and available for you. Ask, challenge, explore and innovate, because doing so, could represent a means to unleash all of the potential you possess and deserve to share and those of us who want to help, and millions around the world will be grateful.

Conclusion

I want to thank all of you for the opportunity to take part in your conference, and if I have kept my promise to leave time for questions and conversation, let us do so right now.