

Remarks of Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Consumer Advisory Committee
Washington, D.C.
October 14, 2016

Yesterday I decided to do a quick online search for car rentals in preparation for an unexpected trip to South Carolina. Though he has been married to my sister for well over 20 years, I had no clue that next weekend would mark a significant birthday milestone for my oldest brother-in-law. Before being asked on the rental car website for a credit card number, driver's license or other personal information, I was given a quoted price that included all taxes and fees. While I can remember this not always being the case, as of late this meant not only government-imposed taxes and fees, but all company-imposed mandatory fees that I would be required to pay if I wanted to take the car off the lot.

Sounds fairly painless and transparent? Yes it was. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for many consumers when they sign-up for phone, Internet, or pay-TV service. We tested out this process earlier this week by visiting the website of a major wireless provider.

After entering a zip code, selecting a device and a monthly service plan, we landed on a page that quoted the total monthly plan charge as \$59.00. Now an asterisk next to the quoted price indicated that this did not include any taxes, fees or surcharges. I had to squint to see that size print because I already celebrated my significant birthday. As we proceeded to checkout, we were prompted to provide date of birth, social security number and credit card information.

This experience demonstrates that many consumers are still signing service contracts unaware of the exact true cost of service. Over the course of a two-year contract, these mandatory "below the line" fees can easily add up to several hundred dollars and for low-income Americans and others on a budget, those additional, unexpected dollars each month can have a big impact.

In July, Congressman Mike Doyle and I penned an Op-Ed which articulated a simple principle: consumers should know exactly what they will pay before they get their first month's bill – and, in fact, this should be known and clear before being asked to provide sensitive personal information. We called on the nation's communications providers to lead the way by voluntarily improving transparency and disclosure of these "below the line" fees so that when consumers sign up for service, either online or in-store, they will not have to wait for their first bill to learn what their service truly costs.

So I am extremely pleased that three months later, the FCC's Consumer Advisory Committee "No Surprises Task Force" has come up with a series of recommendations that address these very concerns. Implementing these recommendations would be a huge win for consumers and an opportunity for providers to show how committed they are to putting customers first.

So once again, to the Task Force, the Consumer Advisory Committee and the staff of the FCC's Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, thank you for your tireless efforts on such an important consumer issue and as always, thank you for being a voice for those too seldom heard.