

Remarks of Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn
Advisory Committee on Diversity and Digital Empowerment
Washington, D.C.
September 25, 2017

I can remember just over four years ago, when the Advisory Committee on Diversity for Communications in the Digital Age, held its last official meeting. To say that there have been multiple advancements in the technology space since 2013 is an understatement, but what remains sobering, is the fact that there have been too few improvements, when it comes to diversity and inclusion in the communications sector. Equally troubling is the problem of digital redlining, a practice that is dividing our communities along economic lines and preventing fast, affordable broadband from reaching those most in need. So, the chartering of a new committee, with a focus on diversity and digital empowerment, including ownership diversity and redlining, pleases me and all of those committed to its stated mission.

Over the next two years, 31 of you will share your private sector, academic, and non-profit world experiences, to inform, encourage and enable me and my fellow Commissioners, to plot a more diverse and inclusive course. The true test of your success, however, will be measured by whether those recommendations lead to action, or are placed on the shelf to collect dust. I am rooting for the former, not only because I believe this is the expectation each of you had when you applied, but because this agency and this nation desperately needs to move the ball down the field when it comes to diversity and inclusion.

Allow me to quickly reiterate my call, for five policies I believe can help move the needle when it comes to digital inclusion. We have seen how the phenomenal success of low-power FM (LPFM) is playing out in local communities across this country. Noncommercial stations like Phoenix's KDIF where I visited earlier this year in Arizona, are helping to serve and address, the unique needs of local and/or underrepresented groups in their communities. The first call I wish to make, is for us to find ways, in which to replicate and enhance this success story for more underrepresented groups – that are largely minority and women – who are seeking to be a part of the broadcast landscape. I urge the Committee to think outside of the box and closely examine new ways to utilize existing frequencies to enhance such opportunities.

Second, in recent years, I have called for the establishment of a pilot incubator program, aimed at increasing the number of women and minority owners in the broadcast space. With similar calls made by my colleagues in the past, I am hopeful we can move forward with this proposal.

Third, when divestitures are required during merger transactions, we should urge parties to strongly consider offers from women and minority business owners. Given the limited availability of broadcast licenses in major markets, such license transfers would enable stations to comply with the Commission's ownership rules, while clearing the path for new diverse entrants.

Fourth, the time to act on the Commission's independent programming NPRM is now. With a robust record of more than 36,000 filings, I believe we have enough data to move to a

final order, targeting two of the worst offending practices facing many independent video programmers: “unconditional” most favored nation (MFN) clauses, and unreasonable alternative distribution method (ADM) provisions.

And lastly, with the help of Congress, we can and should reinstate a tax certificate program, focused on promoting opportunities for new entrants. The quantifiable success, that a similar initiative had in the past, is evidence of the clear benefits that such a policy would have on ownership diversity.

Once again, I am grateful to each of you, for your commitment to service to this agency and our nation, and I look forward to the many recommendations you will ultimately make. It has been a pleasure to join you today, and I would be happy to answer any questions now or in the coming weeks.