

Remarks of FCC Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn (as prepared)

National Energy Marketers Association

21st Annual Restructuring Conference

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Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Craig, for the kind introduction and Catalina, for extending such a warm invitation. I can think of no place I would rather be as I end my term of service than here, during your 21st Annual Restructuring Conference.

When one is being considered for a “Lifetime Achievement Award,” the joy of the recognition can come with anxiety. First of all, it does not feel like that much time has passed and secondly, there is so much more I plan to do. I humbly accept this award, however, for the ground work we have collectively laid for all of the good that is still left to do.

This is a both a transitional and transformative moment for me. After nearly nine years of service on the Federal Communications Commission, and 11 years on the South Carolina Public Service Commission, one chapter for me is closing as the next begins. The intersection where technology, energy, and telecommunications meets has helped define my nearly 20 years in public service, and that intersection is shaping the way each of you is facing this period of non-stop change.

For the most part, we can look forward to remarkable changes over the horizon, but in order to capture and benefit from these great things, all relevant stakeholders—that means each of us in this room, alongside other interested agencies, companies, and consumers—must work collaboratively to get there.

Our 21st Century wired and wireless broadband and telecommunications networks support healthcare, civic engagement, education, economic growth, social networks, news, entertainment, and yes, the energy sector. And when it comes to these networks, I have found the greatest benefits accrue when we start with those core principles that ultimately define who we are and what our responsibility is at the Federal Communications Commission. The FCC is mandated by Congress and, as it clearly states in the Communications Act, it must do everything in its power to ensure that robust, ubiquitous, open, and affordable, advanced telecommunications networks, blanket this country. Without these critical networks, none of the innovation and growth that we hope achieve in any of these sectors, including energy, can be possible.

That is why one of my top priorities has been promoting the deployment and adoption of broadband. And as a group of policy and business leaders devoted to introducing innovation into how we provide businesses and consumers with natural gas, electricity, and energy-related products, I know that you care about and are vested in our next generation communications networks being strong, reliable, and accessible.

Because of this shared concern, I have worked for much needed reforms to our federal universal service programs, so all households and businesses in this country will one day have access to advanced, high-speed broadband services. That is why over nearly nine years, I have supported initiatives to overhaul our high cost program, which subsidizes broadband deployment

in hard-to-serve rural areas. That is why I have pushed for reforms in our other universal service programs, because “if you build it, they will come” only happens when you can afford the service.

Low-income households, schools and libraries that educate and serve those without home connectivity, and those rural healthcare providers that seek to cure our most vulnerable, must be and stay connected, because all of us stand to collectively benefit if that happens.

With each additional connection, our networks become stronger. They become an even more powerful tool for you to utilize as you provide consumers with meaningful energy choice and address any remaining energy challenges.

And in the midst of those existing challenges, lurks another consequential transition—the transition of our current wireless telecommunications networks to the next generation of standards known as 5G. The promise here is greater speeds, which could allow us to transfer more information and data; less latency, which should bring about fewer delays when it comes to that transfer of that data; and the ability to connect to more devices, which should yield greater network efficiency.

I see this next generation standard, however, as a prime opportunity to apply the lessons we have learned from the transitions to previous cellular standards. We can strive to get things right from the very beginning of its roll-out. And while 5G is absolutely critical when it comes to innovative new technologies and networks, such as the “Internet of Things” and “smarter” cities, as well as technology that will help unleash the next wave of smart grid features and efficiency, leaving behind those areas that are rural or have low net worth would be a tragic error.

By allowing many unconnected, energy consuming devices to be integrated into the grid through low-cost connections, 5G promises to enable these devices to be more accurately monitored in order to support better forecasting of energy needs. This will revolutionize energy grids and create innovation in energy delivery, choice, and efficiency. However, these benefits must be ubiquitous if we are to collectively benefit.

As we auction spectrum, and facilitate infrastructure builds for this purpose, why not seize the opportunity to leap frog the status quo when it comes to competition and deployment? I have said this many times before, and I get no comfort in affirming this: too many in our communities are still waiting for a 3G or 4G future.

Can you imagine what our nation would look like if the FCC makes policy choices and industry makes investment decisions that quickly bring these communities up to speed? Remember, nearly half of the communities in this country have one or fewer high-speed broadband providers, so the lack of competition remains a barrier. What if the Commission were to auction off 5G spectrum in a way that promotes more robust competition and incentivizes new competitors in markets across the country? What kind of future could that mean for each of us, where opportunities abound wherever we live, work, or play?

All of this and more is possible, but it will take the collective will of those in this room to make it happen. We all benefit when we are all connected. Let us continue to work together to achieve a totally connected future.

Again, I thank you: for the work that you do, and for the award you honor me with. Public service is hard-wired into my DNA and with or without a title or official position, I promise through continued service and work to live up to the expectations of this honor.

I thank you. Godspeed.