

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MIGNON L. CLYBURN**

Re: *Connect America Fund*, WC Docket No. 10-90, *ETC Annual Reports and Certifications*, WC Docket No. 14-58, *Rural Broadband Experiments*, WC Docket No. 14-259.

When will my community have broadband? For the nearly seven years I have served as an FCC Commissioner, this refrain is one I too often hear as I travel beyond the Beltway. For consumers stuck in the digital darkness, every day is another full of denied opportunities. And while I have been proud to support the FCC's laudable actions taken since the National Broadband Plan was released, the fact remains that change has yet to come for the tens of millions of consumers who still lack access.

Today, it pleases me to say we are taking another step to turn shades of digital darkness and despair into beacons of light and connected opportunities. According to the Center for Public Integrity, families in our nation's higher poverty areas are nearly five times more likely not to have access to broadband speeds of 25 Mbps/3 Mbps, than those residing in the most affluent areas. These are areas of persistent poverty – communities that would actually benefit the most from connectivity – and they are populated by those who are cut off from job opportunities, and remain at a marked disadvantage, when it comes to education, healthcare, government services and civic participation.

I have met consumers so desperate for connectivity that they literally beg for broadband to be deployed in their community because they know all too well that they are stuck on the wrong side of the digital divide. They long for a fair chance to improve their communities and their lives with access to broadband . . . something all of us here, I venture to say, take for granted.

It is clear that connecting these areas will not happen overnight but what our experiences show is that closing these disparities will require both public-private partnerships and public-public partnerships with our federal, state and local colleagues. So, I am pleased that today's item recognizes the important role states play in universal service. In addition, the Further Notice seeks comment on how to ensure that communities across our nation, particularly in states where incumbent carriers declined Connect America Fund Phase II support have access to much needed funding to connect those unserved areas. State and local leaders know their communities best, and should be encouraged to partner with the FCC to bridge opportunity divides.

The Order also encourages smaller entrants to participate in the competitive auction, by, for example, making it easier for smaller banks, including community banks, to provide letters of credit; enabling certain parties to provide audited financial statements after being selected as a winning bidder in the auction; and creating a flexible process to enable entities to use a range of technological solutions to provide service in unserved areas.

We were able to reach consensus on technology neutral speed, capacity and latency tiers for the auction, and those tiers are structured in a way to encourage all providers – fixed or mobile, using licensed or unlicensed spectrum, terrestrial or satellite – to participate. I would have preferred that we also adopt the weights for these tiers now because the weighting will be crucial to ensure that rural areas have access to services reasonably comparable to urban areas, as directed by the statute. Even so, I understand the importance of getting the weights for each tier right, and I appreciate the Chairman seeking comment on the issue now rather than waiting several months to ask these questions in the Auction Comment Public Notice.

I also appreciate that the Order recognizes the need to spur deployment on Tribal lands. For far too long, the FCC has recognized the stark disparities on Tribal lands but has not taken enough action to close these divides. Indeed, the FCC's 2016 Broadband Progress Report found, that more than 68 percent of Americans living on Tribal lands in rural areas lack access to fixed broadband of speeds of 25 Mbps/3 Mbps. I strongly encourage parties to weigh in on the Further Notice, which seeks comment on ways to adopt a credit or weight in the auction to encourage bidding on Tribal lands.

While I am pleased that the action we take today holds the promise to make inroads to connect rural, unserved areas, we need to come to terms with the fact that many challenges remain even in our urban areas. If we as a nation are true to our commitment to universal service, we have a duty to take a long, hard look at what is happening or, really, what is not happening, in some of our more densely populated areas.

We need to ask and answer the question why certain pockets of our communities in major metropolitan areas still lack access. As regulators and as public servants, I do not believe that we should turn a blind eye to these communities where families can literally see from their windows and stoops the power of connectivity, but remain foreclosed, sometimes by less than 2000 yards, from economic opportunities. This is a conversation that I seldom hear in these halls but I believe that needs to change today.

To the dedicated public servants in the Wireline Competition Bureau, the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, and the Office of Strategic Planning & Policy Analysis, I thank you for your unwavering commitment to universal service and for focusing on how to ensure that all Americans have access to the promise that broadband brings.