

# FCC Hot Topics

From the Office of FCC Chairwoman Mignon L. Clyburn

October 2013

## Message from Chairwoman Mignon L. Clyburn



*Mignon L. Clyburn is currently serving as Acting Chairwoman of the Federal Communications Commission. Appointed to this position by President Barack Obama on May 20, 2013, she is the first woman to lead the agency. Clyburn began her service at the FCC in August 2009 as a Democrat on the*

*Commission, and following her re-nomination by the President and confirmation by the United States Senate, she was sworn in for a second term as Commissioner on February 19, 2013.*

Someone once said, “There are two ways of spreading light: one can be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.” As Chairwoman of the FCC, I have sought, like the candle, to play an active role in spreading light as a champion for consumers and a defender of the public interest. Although the FCC has addressed many policy issues that focused on improving the public good, there are six areas that I would like to highlight.

### ***America’s diversity is one of its greatest strengths.***

Ensuring a diversity of viewpoints on our public airways is one of the Commission’s most important responsibilities. I am happy to report that the FCC recently approved new Low Power FM (LPFM) rules that represent the largest expansion of community radio in U.S. history. The window for applications is now open. This means that local nonprofit groups across the country now have a unique opportunity to apply for a license to launch and operate low-power stations. To learn more, please visit <http://www.fcc.gov/guides/how-apply-radio-or-television-broadcast-station>.

***As part of the FCC’s long-standing examination of broadcast diversity issues, I am excited to report the launch of a new study examining the relationships among Hispanic television station ownership, Hispanic-oriented programming, and Hispanic television viewing.***

According to the 2012 Census data, 17% of the U.S. population – or 53 million people – are of Hispanic origin,

representing the largest ethnic/racial minority in the country. This study will be the FCC’s first systematic examination of the Hispanic television market and will be one of the first studies that will incorporate comprehensive data from the Commission’s recently improved ownership database. The goal of this study is to better understand the viewing characteristics of this important and growing population segment to ensure the Commission has better data to inform its policies. To learn more, please visit, <http://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-announces-hispanic-tv-viewing-study-next-step-ocbo-study>.

### ***America is the leader in the development of wireless infrastructure and innovation.***

The deployment of Long Term Evolution (LTE) technology has allowed the U.S. to become the world leader in wireless applications. The demand for new services and applications will continue to grow, creating new opportunities for businesses and entrepreneurs. However, none of this would be possible without the availability of wireless spectrum. Since spectrum is a finite public resource and the demand for it will only increase, the FCC launched GN Docket No. 12-268 “Expanding the Economic and Innovation Opportunities of Spectrum Through Incentive Auctions” with the goal of meeting increasing demand through improvements to the allocation of spectrum.

The Commission must design three key aspects of the unprecedented voluntary incentive auctions: (1) the reverse auction, (2) the repacking of remaining broadcast licensees, and (3) the forward auction. Each of these tasks has its own set of challenges, and we are actively engaged with all of the relevant stakeholders. One issue addressed in this docket is “bidding credits.” These credits would allow small businesses to acquire wireless spectrum in the forward auction process. In addition, the Commission has sought public comment on whether those small business credits are sufficient to create opportunities for businesses owned by women and minorities. The Commission is working hard to ensure that the spectrum auction results in significant improvements felt by the American public through increases in competitiveness, efficiency, and innovation. To learn more, please visit <http://wireless.fcc.gov/incentiveauctions/learn-program/>.

***In addition, schools and libraries have basic Internet connectivity today due to the FCC's E-rate program.*** The E-rate universal service support program helps schools and libraries obtain affordable telecommunications services, broadband Internet access, and internal network connections. As educators across the country integrate digital content into their lesson plans, faster speeds and additional capacity are needed to accommodate all of the interactive educational uses and promises of digital learning. In fact, in a 2010 FCC survey of schools and libraries, nearly half of the responses reported lower Internet connectivity speeds than the average American home. We must do better to ensure that students, teachers, and the millions of citizens who use libraries each year have access to the tools they need to compete and succeed in the digital age.

This summer, we kicked off our efforts to modernize E-rate to achieve greater connectivity across schools and libraries with affordable access to broadband at higher speeds. In particular, we've identified three proposed goals to modernize the E-rate program: (1) ensuring schools and libraries have affordable access to high-capacity broadband; (2) promoting cost-effective purchasing; and (3) streamlining our program administration. As we move forward, this effort will require coordination across communities and from multiple stakeholders, and I am confident that together we can modernize E-rate to achieve these goals. To learn more, please visit <http://www.fcc.gov/e-rate-update>.

***In September, the Commission released an Order that will provide meaningful relief to millions of Americans who have borne the financial burden of unjust and unreasonable interstate inmate calling service rates.***

These reforms are the right thing to do and were a long time in coming. Nearly 10 years ago, Martha Wright, a grandmother from Washington, D.C., filed a petition to the FCC seeking relief from what she described as exorbitant long-distance rates from correctional facilities. Since then, tens of thousands of others have contacted the Commission complaining that the costs they incur to stay in touch with their loved ones are unaffordable. In some instances, the price of a single phone call from prison eclipses the cost of an average basic monthly telephone bill. In 42 states where there have been limited or no reforms, connection fees can run as high as \$4 per call on top of charges of 89¢ per minute.

Our actions will increase inmates' ability to stay in contact with their families and loved ones—including the 2.7

million children with an incarcerated parent. That increased contact reduces recidivism, which benefits all of us through safer communities and by reducing the expense of incarcerating the re-offenders. In fact, one study notes that a 1% reduction in recidivism would lead to \$250 million in annual cost savings.

This Order was a major step toward fulfilling our statutory obligation to ensure that rates for *all* consumers are just, reasonable, and fair. To learn more, please visit <http://www.fcc.gov/document/commision-releases-order-reducing-high-inmate-calling-rates-0>.

***Finally, the FCC has provided necessary services, and increased independence, for individuals with disabilities.***

As our nation's communications technologies continue to evolve, we must ensure that people with disabilities are able to benefit from these innovations. October 8, 2013, marked the effective date for far-reaching provisions of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA). The Act requires access for people with disabilities to advanced communications products and services, as well as accessible Internet browsers on mobile phones. The Commission is working hard to take its final significant step to implement the CVAA. That step will ensure that individuals who are blind or visually impaired can more easily access programming on video equipment and navigational devices, and that deaf or hard of hearing consumers can more easily turn closed captions on and off. In addition, during the late spring and summer of 2013, the Commission adopted reforms for the video relay service and speech-to-speech relay service programs that will help sustain these programs, spur innovation, and improve the efficacy and efficiency of these services. All of these Commission efforts to ensure communications access for people with disabilities will help foster the independence, productivity, and privacy of these individuals.

I am proud of these and the many other accomplishments during my tenure as Acting Chairwoman. And, of course, none of this would be possible without the devoted and hard-working FCC staffers.

*For questions or comments on Acting Chairwoman Clyburn's consumer message, please contact us at [MCconsumermessage@fcc.gov](mailto:MCconsumermessage@fcc.gov).*