

Remarks of Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn (as prepared)
FCC Farewell Ceremony and Portrait Unveiling
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, DC
May 8, 2018

Good afternoon! First, know how grateful I am that each of you took time from your busy schedules to attend my FCC farewell ceremony. And, Commissioner Abernathy, thank you for not only agreeing to emcee this celebration, but for your great counsel throughout my tenure.

I am reminded of something my father has said many times, “As soon as they see you stand up, they want to see you sit down,” but I hope you will forgive me if I am not as brief as you may want me to be.

First, let me thank my former colleagues and past Commissioners, for their kind remarks, their presence here today, and their friendship. My gratitude also goes out to my current colleagues, who had absolutely no advance warning about my departure announcement. So for their gracious remarks last month, today, and more, I thank you. While I will enjoy a break from those monthly marathons—I mean meetings—I am going to miss serving with four terrific Commissioners. We may not have always agreed with each other, but I continue to admire your intellect and willingness to debate critical policy issues.

I am very fortunate, in that I can truly say that I have been a member of not one, but several wonderful families. First of course, is my biological family, which includes generous, caring, and loving parents and supportive siblings. When you hear me say, that “public service is in my DNA,” a state appointed and federally elected public servant, a public school and VA Hospital librarian, and sisters with degrees in education, validate that statement.

Those 11 years on the South Carolina Public Service Commission and almost nine years here at the FCC, were shaped by those lessons and these relationships. On those occasions when they were aware of a disagreement among their children, our parents, notably our Father, would insist that we come out of our respective corners, and work out whatever problem caused the quarrel. I had no idea at the time how invaluable those lessons were, and how not addressing heated disagreements fully and head on can leave lasting wounds. Our family relationships are strong and healthy as a result, and my management and negotiation style has been shaped and on more than one occasion been labeled as effective, because of those lessons.

As a public service commissioner in South Carolina, our constituents were also our neighbors, so if you punted or mis-stepped when it came to an issue, you would hear about it in the grocery aisles of Piggly Wiggly, Bi-Lo, or Food Lion.

And, have you wondered why I chose to dive head first into negotiations to establish solutions to sometimes vexing policy concerns, such as the agreement restoring interoperability in the lower 700 MHz band, helping resource constrained cities process tower collocation applications more efficiently, updating the former defaulter rule, or reforming Lifeline? It is because that is how it was done in our house.

To my work family here at the FCC, which includes nearly 30 direct staffers and an agency full of colleagues, I cannot say thank you enough. These are immensely talented people,

who helped guide me for almost nine years. It truly took this entire agency to help raise this FCC Commissioner, and I am grateful.

When I began my tenure as Chairwoman, I addressed the Commission staff and expressed my love for this agency. The work you do is critical, and accounts for roughly one sixth of the national gross domestic product.

There is hardly anything that happens in this country without the presence of a copper wire, fiberoptic cable, or radio waves transmission. What we do touches the lives of every American, whether they know it or not, and the policies we adopt impact the entire globe.

If there is a common refrain that closes out every interview or discussion I have taken part in over the past three weeks, it is the question of how do I want to be remembered?

While I had no firm idea at the time of the how it would happen, believe it or not, I came to this Commission with a clear objective in mind: to be a conduit for change, an enabler of opportunities, and a voice for the voiceless.

I truly believe in a broad and inclusive approach to policymaking. The best policies, are the ones where all relevant stakeholders benefit. That means serving the unserved, closing existing gaps, and doing nothing to get in the way of those who are advantaged, so long as no one else is unduly disadvantaged. We tried to meet as many outside-the-Beltway constituents as inside-the-Beltway constituents, and I was a better public servant for it.

Now, I am hopeful that you will forgive me today for not mentioning by name those of you who mean so much to me. Not only would it lengthen the program, I could never in a few seconds do you justice. There has been a small list of names rotating on the screens around the room, and while I have omitted many, I have not forgotten how much you mean to me.

But to my staff, past and present, to the incredible employees here at the FCC, to those validators and friends, thank you. And to Congressman James and Dr. Emily Clyburn, I could not have custom made better parents. And to Michele Ellison, I could not have asked for a better work sister and friend.

To everyone here, I thank you for making all of these opportunities possible. I am grateful that you have helped to edit the many pages of my last chapter. As it comes to a close, you will find many words, phrases, and hopefully relationships, from the last chapter in the next. I say hopefully here, because of I am fully aware of how things traditionally work here inside the Beltway once you turn in your badge. So allow me to address that tradition head on as I close with what may sound like a warning that I have shared with a few others.

I may be reaching out to many of you as I begin drafting my next chapter. You will receive a call, text, email, or request from the person formerly known as Commissioner Mignon Clyburn. I may pass you on the street and say hello. But if you act like you don't know me or fail to answer my requests, I promise, I will publicly embarrass you!

Seriously . . . now I am serious, but sincerely, while I will no longer have a vote here at the FCC, I still have a voice. I plan to use it to close divides, create robust opportunities, and establish platforms for those currently not seen or heard. I believe wholeheartedly that one can do well and do good at the same time and there is where I plan to make my mark.

Thank you joining me during this celebration, and know that these eight plus years have been made richer because of you. Godspeed.