

**Remarks of FCC Commissioner  
Mignon L. Clyburn**

**FCC Field Hearing  
Broadband Access for People with Disabilities  
Gallaudet University, Washington, DC  
November 6, 2009**

Good morning everyone. Thank you to Dr. Davila and to Gallaudet University for hosting us. I can think of no more appropriate forum for this important hearing on broadband access for people with disabilities. We are so fortunate to have this extraordinary institution right here in Washington, DC.

I would also like to thank my colleague, Commissioner Copps, for his leadership on this issue, and his staff and the FCC staff for their hard work putting this hearing together. I am very pleased to be here with you, and I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panelists.

When I first came to the Commission a few months ago, I decided that before I met with any industry players, I would meet with representatives of public interest, consumer and civil rights groups. So my office hosted several “roundtables,” and to one of them we invited representatives of several disability rights advocacy organizations. I am pleased to see a number of the people who participated in those roundtables back in early September here today.

Those public interest roundtables were valuable to me in many ways, but more than anything else, I was struck by some advice that I received from one of the disabilities rights advocates in particular. This wise woman said that it was crucial for the Commission to consider the needs of the disabled during its decision process, rather than falling to its unfortunate default position of addressing problems with flawed policies after the fact, when we are forced to retrofit the needs of the disabled into a seemingly incompatible policy determination.

Now, of course that is always a wise approach: we make better policy when we consult the affected parties as part of the decision-making process, no matter who they are or what the subject matter may be. But I think we have learned our lesson on this score in the disability arena more than any other, and it is time that we rethink our approach.

And that is exactly why we are here today: because we want your input at the front end as we develop the National Broadband Plan. By consulting with you today, and by continuing to listen to you in the coming months, we will develop a better, more inclusive Plan. We do not want to do any retrofitting later; when it comes to people with disabilities, we want to get it right the first time. And with your help, we will.

Thank you all again for being here today. I would like to apologize in advance for having to depart before the second panel. I hope my friend Karen and the other distinguished panelist will forgive me. But I will certainly review today's discussion in full with great interest. This is an exciting and important time, and I appreciate you for taking the time to help us shape a National Broadband Plan that truly serves the interests of all Americans.