

**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

Thanks to today's action, we take another step forward in this agency's ongoing effort to close the broadband deployment gap. By auctioning off almost two billion dollars in universal service support to bring broadband to unserved and underserved communities, we do so in a manner that is as fair as possible to potential bidders, and puts #ConsumersFirst.

This Order carefully calibrates how we craft our auction decisions to enable robust competition, and obtain the best bang for our universal service bucks. It ensures that carriers have certainty throughout the term of support, makes changes so that the higher bid tiers meet the needs of consumers, and commits to moving forward with the remote areas fund, an issue that Commissioner O'Rielly and I have been pushing for a long time.

It would have been my preference to include a Tribal bidding credit in the item, so that some of the most challenging places to serve, would be more enticing to carriers seeking to participate in this auction. As I witnessed during my #ConnectingCommunities tour, there are many unique challenges to bringing broadband to Tribal lands, and I lament this missed opportunity to bring these communities much-needed connectivity.

But I want to commend Chairman Pai for bringing forward two significant broadband infrastructure items, so early in his term. I applaud the Chairman's determination, for getting broadband deployed to the American people, and I enthusiastically join in those efforts. But as we all know, infrastructure deployment is only part of this challenge.

We are charged by Congress, "to make available . . . to all the people of the United States, without discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex, a rapid, efficient, Nation-wide, and world-wide wire and radio communication service." I submit, that no network is truly available, nor will any effort shrink the chronic digital canyons that exist, until broadband service is both affordable and accessible. This, indeed is the full promise of our nation's universal service regime, and we should never overlook the fact that the first principle of universal service that Congress chose to enshrine in section 254 of the Communications Act, is quality service at affordable rates.

While we rightly debate how to weigh and structure this auction, we are ever mindful that a truly successful auction will feature robust bidding by many different service providers, using various technologies. We are hopeful for successful buildout timelines, and ultimately more homes being connected, but what we call ill-afford to ignore, is the fact that about half of homes passed in the poorest areas of this nation, will more than likely not sign up for service—and not because they do not want it or need it. They will not sign up, largely because they cannot afford it. When our own data pegs the cost for basic broadband at over \$75 a month, it is easy to understand why many families forego service, particularly if they make less than \$20,000 a year.

We will never truly address, nor will we ever successfully close the digital and opportunities divide in this country by simply by supporting a single broadband provider in an area and hoping to co-opt the line from a disembodied voice from *Field of Dreams*, that "if you build it, they will come." In wealthy areas, deployment with very little else, makes broadband truly "available" to the people who live there. In less prosperous communities, mere deployment, is but a technology bridge to nowhere.

So I am hopeful that in our continued work to comprehensively address the digital divide, we will bring as much firepower to the affordability and accessibility gaps, as we are bringing to tackling longstanding deployment challenges.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank the Wireline Competition Bureau staff for all of their hard work on this item. You have been very busy this month, and I appreciate all the thoughtful, data-driven work that went into developing this item.