

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MIGNON L. CLYBURN**

Re: *Competitive Bidding Procedures and Certain Program Requirements for the Connect America Fund Phase II Auction* (Auction 903), AU Docket No. 17-182; WC Docket No. 10-90

Last month, as part of the Appalachian Ohio-West Virginia Connectivity Summit, I heard from Melissa O'Brien, President of the Roane County Commission. She told me that approximately 80% of that county's rural citizens do not have access to broadband at home. But what she went on to say, is the clincher: "access to high-speed internet needs to be as much a part of a community's infrastructure as passable roads, clean water and adequate electric services."

On that, I wholeheartedly agree.

In pursuit of this goal, the much awaited Connect America Fund (CAF) Phase II auction is key, and by proposing how the auction will be conducted, today's *Public Notice* brings us one step closer, to ensuring all Americans, have access to robust, affordable broadband.

I am pleased that the item seeks comment on ways to make the auction process easier for smaller providers, as well as those that have never participated in a Commission auction. Specifically, at my request, we seek comment on ways to help these providers better understand the process, and ask whether using our Office of Communications Business Opportunities as a clearinghouse, would help providers who need just a little more assistance navigating the auction requirements and mechanics. I hope that stakeholders will come forward during the comment phase with further suggestions, of how to improve the process for our nation's smallest providers and entities unfamiliar with our process.

I keep returning and referencing that visit to Ohio, because I remain struck by the comments of people like Dick Waybright, the President of the Jackson County Commission. "We can remain the status quo and continue to watch West Virginia fall further behind other states," he said, "or provide a middle-mile solution for high-speed internet infrastructure and create jobs." The CAF Phase II auction is all about making sure that those in rural America, including the residents and businesses of Jackson County, have access to the same economic opportunities as those in more densely populated communities. We initially sketched out the structure of this auction in 2011, but now we are on the cusp of quickly moving forward, so that more rural Americans will reap the benefits of broadband in the foreseeable future.

Thanks to the Rural Broadband Task Force, the Wireline Competition Bureau, and Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, for your work to make this auction and the dream of connectivity a reality.