

Remarks of Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn
U.S. Safer Internet Day
Austin, Texas
February 6, 2018

Thank you, Larry, for that wonderful introduction. Good morning, everyone. What an honor it is, to take part in Safer Internet Day 2018 with you, the future leaders of this state and nation.

For more than eight years, I have had the privilege to serve as one of five members of the Federal Communications Commission. The FCC is an 84-year-old agency, which makes rules and sets policies for many of the communications services you use every day, like wireless and landline telephones, cable and free over-the-air television, radio stations, satellite companies and yes, the internet.

Regulators like me realize, accept and embrace our duty, obligation, and responsibility to nurture and protect you. Like those adults who did the same for me, how we go about it today is in many ways different. But in some ways, it is the same as it was when I was in middle and high school. Our police officers and firefighters still take a vow to protect and serve; teachers and counselors maintain their commitment to educate and offer guidance; nurses, doctors and clinicians continue to take an oath, to help us heal. They represent professionals with specific skillsets, that are focused on looking after us when we are vulnerable or in need of support and protection.

But as we move further into the second decade of the 21st century, technology, while it is creating new opportunities, it has opened the door to dangers that did not exist, when I sat in the seats that you occupy. This means that in addition to those who were there for me and my classmates, we are joined today by agencies like the FCC to keep you safe.

Our number one responsibility at the FCC, is to uphold and protect the public interest. That not only means ensuring that everyone is connected, with the ability to use their cell phone, access the internet, receive a television broadcast, or cable signal, but when you use those platforms, you and everyone else should be safe. We work closely with other government agencies, local, state and federal, to provide information about online safety to you, and those who are younger, by finding effective ways, to erase cyberbullying and protect your privacy.

The internet is amazing. It has made engaging in political discussions, and joining online petitions more accessible than ever before. I mention this in particular, because as a public servant, I appreciate the ability to hear from you about issues that matter the most. Each of you has the means to make your voices heard at the FCC, and you should speak up, because the decisions we make at the FCC today, will determine your relationship with your cell phone, internet, and media content provider tomorrow.

Now raise your hand if you have heard anything about net neutrality. For those of you who don't know, net neutrality is the concept, that people like you and me, should be able to access the online apps and services of your choice, without the company that provides you with internet service, interfering. Say you want to binge watch your favorite show over your mobile phone or tablet. Net neutrality means your internet provider should not be allowed to slow down your connection. In other words, net neutrality is the idea, that all legal traffic that travels over the internet, should be treated equally.

In December, the majority of the FCC voted to repeal our nation's net neutrality protections. I objected. Leading up to this vote, I heard from millions of supporters of net neutrality, particularly young people not much older than you, who shared with me why it is so important to have access to a free and open internet.

Unlike my generation, you are digital natives. You have grown up in and around technology in a way that I could only have dreamed of, when I was at Fairwold Middle School in Columbia, South Carolina. So, in the spirit of the good old days that I had in junior high school, it's time for a pop quiz. I promise, I will not issue any grades if you play along with me.

Raise your hand if you have internet at home. Keep your hand up if you have an internet connection at school. Now raise your hand if you have a cellphone... and keep your hand up if you have your cellphone in your pocket or purse right now.

This showed everyone watching two things: one that just about everyone in this room is fortunate, because you are connected through a personal device here, at school, at home, or at public libraries. The internet is a part of your everyday life, in a way that was unimaginable even just a decade ago. It has become an essential part of our economy and our lifestyle. But not everyone in America is so fortunate.

There are more than 24 million people in this country, who lack access to a fast and reliable internet connection, and those limits bring challenges, that go well beyond the ability to use Snapchat or YouTube. Without a reliable internet connection, research for completing homework assignments, the ability to apply for jobs, and participate in our democracy, becomes extremely difficult.

This is why I see my job, as an FCC Commissioner, as one which fights for fast, affordable, open internet for all. When everyone in our society can join us online, we create better opportunities for every American. We can learn about each other and have reasons to better respect each other, through meaningful online interactions. This is a future that I know we can all benefit from being a part of.

What I can say with confidence is that the internet is the most incredible, enabling and democratizing innovation of your lifetime. It has launched historic and conscious changing movements. It has exposed wrongdoings and brought down some of our nation's most powerful and influential. It has helped to create the largest number of young billionaires in our nation's history by allowing creative, life altering ideas, to

quickly come to market. It has changed the way we learn, eat, buy, sell and interact with each other.

The internet has shaped your lives and has erased the need to have a storefront to get products or services to market. It has allowed us to go straight to consumers without using a middleman who could eat away at our profits. It allows you to share your personal story with the world without anyone standing in your way. The internet, when it is free and open, prohibits any gatekeeper, company or government, from blocking, slowing down or making you pay more for the same access to content and services online.

The internet affords endless opportunities for everyone. But, this kind of power is something you should never take for granted. You cannot let your guard down when it comes to ensuring that this freedom of access remains in your hands. None of us should.

The opportunities you enjoy today by being online, are not shared by everyone around the world. And if we are not vigilant, if we do not work hard at ensuring that the power of the internet remains with you, its future may look very different from today. The internet is a powerful tool, and its usefulness and functionality, rests literally in your pockets. The internet does and should forever belong to you.

And as each of you grow, learn, move on to high school, college or advanced training, and ultimately join the workforce, you will continue to shape what the internet looks like, through your actions and aspirations. Leaving this powerful invention in better shape than you found it, is your responsibility. Finding ways to ensure that the internet is a safer place not just for you, but for adults like me, is largely in your hands.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to join you today here in Austin. Accept and embrace the power and responsibility you have at your fingertips, and if we have time for questions and comments, I would be happy to hear more from you.