



**National
Urban League**

UCC Everett Parker Lecture and Awards Breakfast

Remarks of Alisa Valentin Senior Director, Technology and Telecommunications Policy National Urban League

October 24, 2023

Thank you so much, Mr. Williams, for the kind introduction.

Also, thank you, to the UCC Media Justice Ministry for this honor. And thank you to Cheryl Leanza specifically for all her advocacy over the years and for always being there for me when I needed to understand the history of a policy issue that isn't always obvious from reading the press or pouring over the FCC docket and for always making sure that people, no matter how new that might be to the space, always have an opportunity to contribute. I am truly humbled to be standing before you today, especially among the fellow honorees including Senator Duckworth and Chair Rosenworcel. Thank you both for your continued service.

So let me begin by saying that I, like most people in this country, come from a family of unsung heroes who have not always had the privilege of hearing or feeling people honor them because oftentimes we wait to honor people after they have left this earth not always realizing or acknowledging in real time all the life lessons they taught us or sacrifices they made for us to be in the position we're in right now. So I want to take this time to thank my parents, Edward and Odessa Valentin, and my brother, Dr. Eddie Valentin Jr., who have heard more about tech and telecom policy than what they probably would have ever liked to hear and at this time they have a lot of thoughts and opinions about what a robust digital discrimination rule should look like and how best to protect the precious data of consumers using online platforms. Thank you to my mom for all the times she practiced spelling words with me and drove me to and from countless student council meetings and drama classes and who also told me she wasn't going to go get any new crayons at 8 o'clock at night just because I wanted to enter a coloring contest when we "had crayons at the house." And to my brother, who taught me the love of creative writing when he would read me his short stories as a kid that were about 75 college-ruled pages long front and back and not short at all. And finally, thank you to my dad who told me to get back out onto field after I ran to the sidelines crying after a boy tackled me in a co-ed flag football game in second grade but I'm sure is one of the many reasons why I'm always willing to fight when I've been knocked down.

I'm here today because of them and also because of many of the people here in this room and I'm forever grateful for the way this community that has poured into me over the years. You know, when I was an intern in FCC Commissioner Clyburn's office



seven years ago, which makes me sound young, but I was a third-year Ph.D. student at the time so there's that. But one of the first things Commissioner Clyburn said to our intern class is, and I'm paraphrasing here, "People are always going to have something to say and what you need to get comfortable with is knowing that when lay your head down on your pillow at night that you have done everything you can to move the ball forward in the best way that you can under those specific circumstances. Again, people are always going to have something to say."

And as I've gone throughout my career, I have learned that is oh so very true. Listen, you're not going to always make people happy, and you can't be everything to everyone all at the same time. But you can do is be true to yourself and your values. What you can do is not only bring yourself into the room but look over to your neighbor and say, "I'm going to bring them too."

What we can't afford to be advocates or policymakers that are more concerned about what helps the few over the many. We can't be those who are hesitant to stand up to entities who seemingly have more power just because they have more money. We also can't be unwilling to work with the other side because it could cloud what could be a fruitful relationship on a specific policy issue. See to a lot of us in this room policy isn't just a job. It's personal; at least I know it is for me. We're carrying every community who doesn't have the same access and privileges as us into that room. And it's a responsibility we don't take lightly. But the more people we have in the hallowed halls of Congress, the White House, the FCC, FTC, corporations, and civil society that look like me, that responsibility feels like less of a boulder that you're moving uphill alone. And that's why I implore all of us to not only ask who is in the room but also who is missing. Because those missing and strategically marginalized voices have value. The fact of the matter is those we count out from South Georgia, Detroit, those living in border towns, and tribal lands are the definition are creative, resilient, and those are the folks who know how to get things done. Why? Because our lives depend on it.

You see, technology and telecommunications policy intersect with one's ability to dream. The decisions we make today, and I hope I don't have to file an *ex parte* when I say this, but the decisions we make today about having continued funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program, standing up an Office of Civil Rights at the FCC and FTC, including diversity, equity, and inclusion measures in merger guidelines at the FTC and DOJ, ensuring that civil rights and privacy are centered in artificial intelligence legislation, and having a meaningful and impactful digital discrimination are policies and practices that empower one's ability to dream. And in turn, that impacts the economic, political, and social fabric of this country for the better and for the benefit of all.



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And because I know I only have 3-5 minutes and I truly don't want to be *that* person, let me end by saying this. We can only be the best advocates we can be if we take the time to rest.

So, if you don't answer my emails or phone calls within a few hours, trust me when I say that I'm sooo okay with that. Because at the end of the day, this system wants to exhaust us to the point where we aren't able to fight, we aren't able to think clearly, we aren't able to present new ideas to solve issues. And I refuse to let the system of oppression that I'm constantly fighting against have me.

As Trica Hersey, who calls herself the Nap Bishop, says "Rest is resistance."

Thank you so much.