

**Remarks by Nilda Gumbs
Presenting The Media Institute's
2023 American Horizon Award
To Michael K. Powell
October 19, 2023**

Good evening. It is an honor to be here tonight to present the American Horizon Award to my leader, mentor, and friend Michael Powell. I have to be honest with you, I was very nervous about doing this.... Not because I had to stand here before all of you ... I'm nervous because, well, I've been to a few award programs in my time and there's a fine line between an award introduction and a eulogy. So let's see how this goes.

I've had the privilege of working in the telecom industry and at NCTA for 30 years now, but have only worked with Michael directly, serving as his chief of staff, for 2 years, 9 months, and 14 days. Why do I know exactly how long it's been – because it has been one of the most fulfilling career opportunities I have ever experienced. And I owe that to Michael and his extraordinary leadership.

Visionary leadership takes what I like to call the 3C's – Courage, Curiosity, and Compassion.

It was courageous when Michael, while Chair of the FCC, proposed the four guiding principles of internet freedom in 2004 and gave a speech in February of that same year in which he said: “Digital Migration’ is a term I coined to describe our movement from a slow, conventional analog world to a digital world that promises incredible new opportunities for faster, more reliable, and higher-quality communications. The move to this digital world comes with a radical transformation, but its benefits will be felt by every American.”

That was his vision 20 years ago, and today we can bear witness to the determination of a young Michael Powell and his commitment to leading the way for communications as we know it today.

Curiosity helps us ask the tough questions like “how did we get here, why are we still here, and what does it take to move from here?” Leadership is about seeing around corners when others can't or sometimes won't. It's about finding the white space to make a difference and leaning into the possibility there's always room for improvement.

Not a day goes by that Michael isn't strategizing on how to keep his team at NCTA sharp, engaged, and growing. His passion for learning leads to his compassion for those who have yet to unlock their full potential. Every day he shares an interesting article he's read, an enlightening podcast, or TEDTalk about technology, politics, human suffering, philosophy, and of course LEADERSHIP in the modern age. He teaches graduate and executive leadership classes in his spare time but he's also a student of human psychology and believes deeply in the promise of humanity.

Michael embodies the American Horizon Award. His passion for being in service to others and his visionary leadership is evidenced by his time at the FCC, Chair of the Mayo Clinic Board of Trustees, former chair of the William & Mary Foundation Board (his alma mater), and his unwavering dedication to America's Promise Alliance, an organization that Michael's family has been deeply committed to for decades. And that's the short list of organizations where Michael has given his gifts and talents.

An award is not just another plaque on the wall – it's recognition by your peers that “you done good, kid.” It's the preservation of your legacy told by others for generations to come, and it's a reminder that others came before to make us better. Michael, tonight we see you for the visionary leader you've always been and celebrate your accomplishments so that 20 years from now, your grandson Theo will know just what you meant to the telecom industry and how you helped shape its history. Congratulations.