

**Remarks of Commissioner Chong  
CUDC MESA Intern Event  
San Ramon, California  
July 13, 2006**

Congratulations to all of the CUDC MESA interns present at the dinner tonight! I wanted to let you know how proud I am of your participation in this program. From my point of view, you are the future generation of utility leaders. In fact, I am hoping that this room holds a future California PUC commissioner.

Now, that might sound crazy, but it does not seem that long ago that I was a “small town” college girl from the Central Valley – Stockton to be precise. Most Chinese parents want their children to go into science or math, but I was the rebel that bucked the trend and went into the liberal arts.

Like you, I went to college with a dream. My dream was to become a newscaster and travel the world. I understand you have dreams of becoming scientists, mathematicians and engineers. Please, each of you -- *hold onto your dream*. Put in the work to make your dream come true, because *you* are the one who will make it come true – maybe with “a little help from some friends” like the ones in this room.

My dream came true. I did indeed travel the world – China, Japan, Korea, Canada and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas -- but not as a journalist, but as an FCC commissioner, representing the United States in matters involving radio frequency and broadcasting matters.

When I went to college, an inspirational professor got me interested in constitutional law relating to free speech and free press issues. This mentor inspired me to go to law school in San Francisco. There I studied hard and became editor of the communications law journal there. Through that work, I became aware of the Federal Communications Commission, the federal agency that regulates telephones, broadcasters and cable companies.

Right at that moment, the FCC was beginning to license the first spectrum licenses for cellular phones. This was a novel concept at the time, only imagined in futuristic TV shows like “Star Trek.” Captain Kirk had that cool communicator badge pinned to his uniform by which he could talk wirelessly to his crew. It had a great coverage area – the entire universe.

Like Captain Kirk's "comm badge," cellular service was envisioned as phones without wires that would work everywhere in the United States. Remember: this was 1984 and all we had back then were phones with wires. A really exciting phone was a pink Princess phone! Well, I got really excited about the concept of cell phones – I realized how they would fundamentally change how people communicated.

So I packed up my bags and went off to Washington D.C. where I practiced law before the FCC, representing TV and radio broadcasters and the earliest cellular phone applicants. It was incredible to be in Washington D.C., the nation's capitol, working on the hottest communications technologies of the time.

This is when I wished I had more of a science background, as I would take very technical information about how the cellular systems worked and make legal arguments about why our client's systems were better than other applicants.

After three years in DC, I came back home to California where I practiced telecom law before the California PUC at a big law firm for many years. The California Public Utilities Commission is the state agency that regulates California's energy, telecom and water utilities.

I worked long hours at the law firm, and after four years, I achieved an important personal goal – to become a partner in the law firm. There were not many minority female partners at the time, and I wanted to show that I had the right stuff.

Then lightning struck and a blue moon rose in the California sky. President Clinton's transition team did outreach across the nation looking for a minority female with telecom experience, preferably a lawyer, for a seat as a commissioner on the FCC.

Well, I think there were maybe three of us in the entire nation that met those criteria. I was very lucky and was nominated by the President for a commissioner seat on the FCC at the age of 34 years old. I am proud to be the first ever Asian American FCC commissioner, and one of the youngest to boot.

Did you know if you become an FCC commissioner, your office comes with a six foot tall US flag in it?!

I had a great time as an FCC commissioner, working on hot button issues like bringing digital television to all Americans, introducing competition to the local

phone market, and bringing some exciting new wireless services to our nation. Believe me, it was very hard work. You might wonder, what does a commissioner do?

A commissioner is a lot like a judge, who listens to many views of all the parties and then works with fellow commissioners to have a fair outcome on difficult and often technical policy issues. The commission expresses itself via written decisions. So my FCC life included a lot of meetings with lobbyists trying to persuade me what to do, mountains of proposed decisions to read, and negotiations with other commissioners on what the FCC ought to do.

I came to appreciate having all views before me as a commissioner – including the views of scientists, economists, mathematicians, auction theorists, and my favorite, futurists. Now, that's a cool job, predicting the future. Do futurists' offices come equipped with crystal balls?!

After my 3-1/2 years at the FCC, I practiced law for while, worked on a telecom start up, opened my own business, and served on a few corporate boards. I started a family.

Just six months ago, I got a second call to public service, this time from Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Again, I am the first Asian American CPUC commissioner. Why did I do it again? Well, this Commissioner office came with TWO flags, the US flag and the California bear flag!

What I also love about my job is that public policy is important; after all, energy, water and telecom law impacts every Californian.

I tell you my story because you too can have an exciting career in communications, energy or the water industry if you aspire to one. If a kid from Stockton can end up an FCC commissioner, anything is possible!

As a PUC commissioner, I have four professional advisors who work for me – two of them have advanced policy degrees, and two have law degrees. One would expect they got there with liberal arts undergrad degrees. In fact, as to undergraduate degrees, two of my advisors hold engineering degrees and a third has a math degree. So, having a math, science or engineering degree does not preclude you from making high level policy some day.

I encourage you to think about a career in a public utility for a few reasons. What are the basic services people cannot live without?

Certainly, the most basic services include water, electricity, and phone service.

You have worked this summer for those utilities that provide these key services to Californians. As a Commissioner, my job is to set affordable rates for electricity and fair market rules for phone company competition. Utilities provide critical infrastructure that our society simply cannot live without. Californians expect me to ensure that California gets the infrastructure that it needs for the jobs of the future at a reasonable price.

The issues that come before me are interesting in each of these industries. They are generally at the place where private interest and the public interest converge. The issues often require a balancing of two different social goals, such as cheap energy v. clean energy.

Let me give you a flavor of some things I am working on now.

- How should the PUC encourage electric utilities to use more renewable power sources, such as solar power, wind, and biomass power sources, in order to reduce green house gas emissions to prevent global warming?
- How can the PUC bring more broadband communication services to underserved communities like low income, rural, and to senior citizens?
- How can the PUC upgrade aging water systems and remove environmentally dangerous chemicals in our drinking water without increasing water rates to the point of being too expensive for their captive customer?

I know some of you will want to work directly on designing and deploying these new technologies and solving these problems. But I also encourage you to think about a career in public policy, working to decide the best outcomes for society on behalf of the government. This is a special calling, for those who have care about how our society should be.

One final theme: I want to talk about diversity. California's demographics show that in the year 2000, for those under 17, 45% were Latino, 39% were White, 9% were Asian and 6% were African American. This shows that California is very diverse, and will only grow more so.

I believe it is very important to bring more diversity into our workforce of our increasingly high technology economy. In my view, the success of our California society depends on marshalling the talents of each of these diverse communities into our larger society and the creation of a shared common-good. Nowhere is that task more important than in the infrastructure industries that provide the power, water, and communications needed by all.

This great state has embraced diversity. California has undertaken the experiment of building a society out of people with diverse religions, histories, and races. My great grandfathers arrived here from China seeking a better life during the California gold rush of the 1850s. We owe it to ourselves, to our ancestors who brought us here, and to our children to make the democratic experiment a success.

To this end, I support more diversity on our regulated utilities' boards of directors.

I support supplier diversity initiatives and programs, and efforts by utilities to increase their diversity among their workforce.

I applaud the excellent work being done by CDUC, including the sponsorship of this outstanding intern program with MESA. I thank CDUC, MESA and the sponsoring utility companies for their key roles in making this intern program a success. I realize how much time and effort goes into such a program. I hope you interns realize what a rare opportunity you have been given, make the most of your experience here, and remember to thank all your sponsors for this unique opportunity.

I also wanted to thank CDUC for the Customer Service and Marketing Committee survey which evaluated the availability of in-language customer service and educational materials to address the needs of California's diverse population. The CPUC had a very substantive and informative presentation by Nancy Zarenda to the PUC's In Language workshop a few weeks ago. This information will be very helpful to us in our In Language docket, and also in thinking about how the PUC reaches out to our citizens with information about their utilities services.

I am happy to answer any questions you have, and I thank you for inviting me.