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Now in Place: The Genachowski Commission

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It has been a good many moons since the Obama administration swept into office, and the FCC was not immune from the complaint leveled against the administration generally – that it has been inordinately slow about filling senior slots at the federal agencies. But with Fall in the air, the FCC, like college campuses welcoming hordes of beanie-wearing, fresh-faced frosh, is experiencing its own influx of new blood.

This summer, the Senate finally reviewed and passed on 80% of the Eighth Floor, confirming two new Commissioners, re-confirming one, and putting its imprimatur on the new Chairman. At the same time, we bade a hearty farewell to the harmonica-jamming Jonathan Adelstein, who had been itching for some months to take his show on the road over to the Rural Utility Services at the USDA.

Here's a quick program to help you recognize the new players.

First and most obviously, we have the new Chairman, Julius Genachowski. No stranger to the FCC, he served as Chief Counsel to Chairman Reed Hundt and Special Counsel to then General Counsel (but soon-to-be Chairman) Bill Kennard back in the mid-1990s. A Harvard Law classmate of President Obama – he served as the Chairman of then-candidate Obama's Technology, Media and Telecommunications Working Group, which helped shape the President's telecommunications policies during the campaign – he clerked for two Supreme Court Justices (and a D.C. Circuit judge, to boot), spent some time on Capitol Hill and, after leaving the Commission in 1997, worked in the technology sector as an executive and entrepreneur. While the Big Guy has historically skewed toward the new tech end of things, broadcasters will appreciate that he has roots in their backyard: his résumé includes a stint as a writer and researcher for Fred Friendly. He's also a certified emergency medical technician and former CPR instructor, so you know who to call if you have a coronary incident while visiting the Commission.

His Chief of Staff is Edward Lazarus, an attorney who had been co-head of the “global

litigation practice” of a world-wide firm with more than 800 lawyers. Genachowski’s two senior advisors – Colin Crowell and Bruce Liang Gottlieb – have considerable experience on the Hill and at the FCC, respectively. Sherrese Smith will be Genachowski’s go-to Legal Advisor for media matters. She was most recently Vice President and General Counsel for Washington Post Digital, and has deep roots in the area of intellectual property. Finally, long-time Commission veteran Mary Beth Richards is back from a three-year tour in the FTC’s Bureau of Consumer Protection. Prior to that, she had spent 23 years in a number of positions throughout the FCC. Richards will head up the FCC Reform initiative “to provide openness and transparency”.

Next up, Commissioner Robert McDowell, returning for a new term. Filling one of the Republican seats, McDowell has served on the Commission since 2006. A lawyer by training, he was an executive for an association representing competitive facilities-based telecommunications service providers and their supplier partners before joining the FCC.

One of two new faces at the Portals is Commissioner Mignon Clyburn. Clyburn knows about government regulations, having served the past 11 years on the Public Services Commission of South Carolina. (She was Chair of the PSC for two of those years.) Prior to that, she was the publisher and general manager of the *Coastal Times*, a weekly newspaper in Charleston, South Carolina. Her father, House Majority Whip James Clyburn, is the highest-ranking African-American member of Congress. Commissioner Mignon promises to bring a decidedly outside-the-beltway perspective to her job.

The second new face is that of Meredith Attwell Baker. You probably heard of her back when the DTV Transition was all over the news: she was then acting head of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), which (among other things) was in charge of the DTV converter box coupon program. Prior to her stint in the government, Baker spent several years in the telecom industry. She also has a prominent relative: her father-in-law is James Baker, former Secretary of State. Both of the new Commissioners have announced their slates of aides-de-camp, most of whom are seasoned veterans wise in the ways of the Commission.

There are a few new faces as well in Commissioner Copps’s office. Copps is the longest serving member of the Commission at this point, and not surprisingly there has been some turn over in his staff as folks defect to private industry or other duties.

Down at the Bureau level, William “Bill” Lake is the new permanent chief of the Media Bureau. He is a communications lawyer who served as head of the Commission’s DTV task force in the march-up to the transition. Bob Ratcliff, who had been serving as acting chief, will now become a Deputy Chief in the Media Bureau, as will Kris Monteith, formerly Chief of the Enforcement Bureau.

Other new appointments include: Chief, Enforcement Bureau – P. Michele Ellison; Chief, Wireless Bureau – Ruth Milkman; Chief, Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau – Rear Admiral (ret.) Jamie Barnett); Managing Director –Steven VanRoekel; General Counsel – Austin Schlick; Chief, Office of Strategic Planning and Policy Analysis – Paul de Sa; Director, Office of Legislative Affairs – Terri Glaze; and Chief Economist – Jonathan Baker.

So there you have it. From all appearances, the newbies have hit the ground running and are already delivering speeches, holding meetings, and getting immersed in the myriad of matters which have languished while the Commission was in transition.