

**TESTIMONY OF FCC COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND THE INTERNET
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Chairman Markey, Congressman Upton, Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to return, at least briefly, to the Capitol—which was home to me for so many years, beginning almost 37 years ago—to discuss with you the state of communications in our country and the role the FCC is playing today, and what more it might do, as we seek to bring the wonders of modern communications to all our citizens. I am constantly struck by how important this work is. Communications industries comprise one-sixth of our economy—and when you consider their social, cultural and political dimensions, there is no doubt in my mind that communications is the most formidable and influential enterprise in all the land.

There is a lot of serious work ahead for all of us if we are going to realize the potential of the technologies and services rushing toward us in this hugely transformative Digital Age. This work involves every sector of communications. Our **media** make many impressive contributions to our communities every day, but we still do not have a media environment that fully, or even adequately, serves our democracy and the vibrancy of our citizens. Regarding **broadband**, without a well thought out game plan to bring the wonders of the Internet to everyone across our great land, millions of people are at serious risk of being left behind. On **public safety**, despite the horrible costs of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, we still are not ready for the next man-made or natural disaster. The last time a major disaster confronted our nation we were perhaps caught by surprise; if

we are not ready next time, none of our fellow citizens is going to accept surprise as an excuse. These three areas are my priorities as a Commissioner.

Let me start with the issue many of you know is closest to my heart: the broadcast media. I have met with many local broadcasters who work hard to serve the public interest. But the public-spirited part of the enterprise is being squeezed out. Too often the programs we receive are homogenized, creativity-killing, and often gratuitously violent. Perhaps, even worse, the dearth of political and community coverage threatens our democratic dialogue and the independent viewpoints we depend upon to help us make good decisions for the future of our country. Localism, diversity and competition are not abstract constructions; they are the essential ingredients for keeping our nation's media—and our nation—healthy, vibrant and growing. I am pleased that Chairman Martin has committed to complete our long-dormant localism proceeding before moving forward on media ownership because so much of what is local has disappeared from much of our media. In the last year I have participated in probably a dozen media hearings in localities around the country. I am seeing in the last few months a noticeable shift—a growing impatience with things as they are. Whether this is motivated by examples of new programming lows, the further consolidation of news rooms and music play lists, or a new spirit of change abroad in the land, I don't know for sure. But I do know this—whatever the reason, millions of people are no longer content just to defeat bad *new* media consolidation rules. There is a thirst—one that I share—for us to revisit the bad *old* rules that got us into this predicament in the first place. What many people want, and I wholeheartedly agree, is to bring back some basic public interest standards—a responsibility to serve the common good—to the broadcast media and to bring the spirit

of public interest to other media as well. I hope we can talk more about this today, including the need for a credible broadcast re-licensing system and an equally compelling need to assure that digital broadcasting is made to serve the public interest.

Turning briefly to telecommunications, I worry that we are teetering on the edge of a Digital Divide in the 21st century that may be more difficult to bridge than the one we encountered in the century just past. Our biggest infrastructure challenge as a nation is bringing broadband to all Americans—and I mean *all* of our people. Each and every citizen of this great country should have access to the wonders of the Internet—whether they live in rural areas, on tribal lands, or in our inner cities; whether they have limited incomes or disabilities; whether they are schoolchildren or seniors. The data are not encouraging. The International Telecommunications Union ranks your country and mine at 15th in the world in broadband penetration. And the ITU’s more recent and nuanced Digital Opportunity Index has us at 21st – right after Estonia and tied with Slovenia. That strikes me as 20 rungs too low for the United States of America. Do we expect our kids to enter the digital classroom and the digital world at dial-up speeds? We are paying a business and competitive cost for this poor performance, too. Fewer Americans with broadband means a smaller Internet marketplace and a glass ceiling over the productivity of small businesses and entrepreneurs, especially in rural and inner city areas. But what did we expect without having a real broadband strategy?

Perhaps the first step in developing a national broadband strategy is to develop better, more granular broadband data to identify where the problems lie and how best to craft solutions. There are folks in far off places like Japan, and a few right here at home, like in Kentucky, who are charting precisely where broadband is going—so we know the

data can be gotten. I hope this Committee will push the Commission to develop better data, propose creative options and solutions, and be more proactive in working with you to develop a national broadband strategy for the 21st Century. We have at our agency some of the most skilled and talented experts in telecommunications in all the world; they can make a huge difference in helping us to meet and master the broadband challenge.

Finally, let me just comment on one of the more vexing problems that I know each of you is focused on: public safety. The most important obligation of any public servant is the safety of our people. I believe that after 9/11 this agency allowed others to step in to do the job that the FCC has the expertise and the know how to do—improving our communications capabilities in times of emergency. Chairman Martin, to his credit, has made this a priority and in doing so has created a Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, and the Bureau is starting down this difficult road. And it has adopted an initiative I long advocated—developing a communications clearinghouse for public safety and homeland security ideas so that local hospitals, charities, public safety officers, small businesses, and many others need not start from scratch when developing emergency communications plans. They don't have the time, money or people to start from scratch, and we need to find ways to help them. The new Bureau has only begun this effort and its success will require a meaningful, on-going commitment of resources. But if we stick to it, we can save the country time, money and, perhaps, even lives.

During the Senate's FCC oversight hearing last month, I was pleased to hear bipartisan support for an admittedly more minor, but I think important, legislative initiative. I encourage you to consider modifying the closed meeting rule so that the five Commissioners could actually sit down and talk with one another occasionally. I can't

think of any proceeding in recent years that would not have benefited from an open and frank exchange of ideas among us before we were expected to cast a vote. We are prohibited from doing this. The nine Supreme Court justices, the 435 members of this body, and most every other institution I can think of are encouraged to meet and exchange views before deciding outcomes. If it's good enough for them, it ought to be good enough for us.

Finally, in addition to talking with one another, the Commission must always work to expand its conversations with our fellow citizens. Business is obviously an important stakeholder in the work we do at the Commission, and it should be. But in communications, *every* American is a stakeholder, because each of us is affected in so many important ways. I believe that an important part of being a commissioner is to reach out to non-traditional stakeholders as well as traditional, to ensure that Commission decisions do indeed reflect the wide public interest. If business, government, and non-traditional stakeholders work together to build public-private partnerships, we can meet our many communications challenges in the coming years. In my view, that's how we built this great country, infrastructure challenge by infrastructure challenge. And it is how we can keep it growing and keep it great.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for your attention and I look forward to our conversation this morning.