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CHAIRMAN POWELL OUTLINES STRONG CONSUMER ADVOCACY PROGRAM “Everything We Do Is About Consumers”

Washington, DC – Stating that “Everything we do is about consumers,” Michael K. Powell, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), detailed his policies and goals for serving telecommunications consumers. In a speech delivered today before the Federal Communications Bar Association in Washington, DC., Powell said, “I believe very deeply that maximizing consumer welfare is the paramount objective of public policy.”

Chairman Powell said he was proud to have a robust and effective consumer protection component at the FCC – the Consumer Information Bureau (CIB). He noted that this bureau was established in 1999 out of a recognition that the Commission needed a staff focussed exclusively on addressing the concerns of the American consumer. In addition, he pointed out “The bureau also helps bridge the gap between consumers and the industry, by facilitating discussions between the two and by sharing consumer concerns and ideas with the industry.”

He said the Commission would follow a consumer policy that is focussed on six specific areas:

1. **Managing Expectations.** “Offering realistic assessments of what is available and what a consumer may actually experience is invaluable to the consumer experience. Through brochures, consumer alerts, consumer forums and our web page, we try to provide information on what to look for and what to ask about, when shopping for service,” he said.
2. **Clarifying Confusion.** “A consumer must be able to make informed decisions in a competitive market,” Chairman Powell said. “For example, we are looking at initiatives that will provide fuller explanations of telephone bills as well as considering ways we might simplify the confusion of line items.”
3. **Efficiently Resolving Consumer Complaints.** “We are working hard to improve our processes,” he said. “We take in a wealth of information at our consumer centers and we are not developing systems that will analyze the data and report consumer concerns to the policy bureaus so that they can track consumer issues and integrate solutions into rulemakings.

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4. **Accommodating Special Needs.** “There are some areas the market often will not effectively address,” he noted. “In section 255, Congress recognized that perhaps the most significant is in the area of persons with disabilities. We have a concerted focus on how technology can provide access for this community.”
5. **Advancing Opportunity in the Communications Field.** Noting his disappointment with a recent court decision which resulted in rejection of the FCC’s Equal Employment Opportunity rules, Chairman Powell said he intended “to recommend to my colleagues that we consider pursuing new rules that increase employment opportunity in a manner that complies with the judicial limitations of the Constitution, and that are not unduly burdensome on the industry. I also intend to continue to explore ways to improve the opportunity for ownership. I have been a strong supporter of the revised tax credit bill, sponsored by Senator McCain and supported by Congressman Rangel as one of the most important steps we can take.”
6. **Improving Access to the Network.** Chairman Powell noted that “only 30 percent of all . . . low-income individuals that are eligible for lifeline phone service actually take advantage of the service.” He continued, “We are committed to working with the states to increase participation in these low-income programs. . . . We will remain vigilant with regard to the deployment of advanced communication services and constantly look at ways to accelerate efficient deployment for all Americans, particularly those in rural areas.

Chairman Powell said, “I am the first to admit that deregulation for its own sake is not responsible policy. What is good policy is to carefully examine rules to determine if they are actually achieving their stated purposes, or if, instead, they are in fact denying consumers value by impeding efficient market developments that consumers would welcome. . . . There are many examples of deregulation by the Commission that were met with fierce claims that consumers would suffer as a result. When the deed was done, however, we often witnessed instead the flourishing of innovation and competition, from which consumers benefited magnificently.”