

STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS

Re: Presentation on 2003 World Radiocommunication Conference

I had the privilege of participating in the World Radiocommunication Conference 2003 in Geneva last month and was tremendously impressed with the effort made by the U.S. negotiating team, from the top down. And our FCC team, both in Geneva and back here at home, performed with great credit to the agency and to the country.

A number of things struck me as soon as I arrived. First, Ambassador Janice Obuchowski and her team were already reaping benefits from the comprehensive and detailed preparatory work that they had been engaged in for so many months. The bilateral engagements begun early on by the Ambassador had already gotten our country's positions and priorities known by most delegations and the conversations were therefore well advanced. Secondly, the atmosphere at the Conference was serious and businesslike. Perhaps that was because telecom has been through some difficult years and most of the global players knew this was not the time for games and one-upmanship. Rather it was the time to make progress together. There were some who predicted a far more politicized conference, but that just didn't happen. I suspect both the times, and the skill of our good Ambassador, had something to do with this. Third, the United States appeared to have a realistic set of goals and objectives and a well-planned strategy for achieving them. And our government's agencies worked together -- really together -- to make it happen. Fourth, I found a generally positive attitude toward our delegation and our country in all the bilateral discussions in which I participated. I don't think everyone expected this, either.

I know we are still assessing the results of the conference, but it appears that we attained several of our most important objectives and made notable progress across just about the whole gamut of policy concerns that we took to Geneva. The 5 GHz Radio Local Area Network item was surely one of the most important to be taken up and, from what I understand, we got a livable compromise and then some for a mobile service allocation here. We had a win on a global secondary allocation for aeronautical mobile satellite service, so in-flight broadband service takes a giant stride toward becoming reality. There was progress on public safety and security. There were several other areas where real and tangible progress was made and these have been alluded to in the Bureau's report this morning, so I won't go into them here, but the results appear to be considerable.

In addition to the numerous bilateral meetings in which I participated, there were many opportunities for more informal meetings with delegates from around the globe. Here we could pursue not only formal Conference agenda items, but many other matters of mutual interest to our Commission and to regulators from many lands. One meeting I particularly enjoyed was with Dr. Veena Rawat, the Conference Chair. She is a major reason for the success of the Conference. Her leadership was strong and tireless, she showed amazing ingenuity, and her diplomatic skills were apparent throughout.

Our U.S. effort was led, of course, by Janice Obuchowski. She performed with masterly skill. She has a disciplined negotiating style, all-too-rare diplomatic finesse, effective inter-agency leadership skills, and the kind of personality that helps win friends and influence people. I want publicly to thank her for her leadership and also for her many kindnesses to me as a member of the U.S. delegation. Her work is not yet done, however, and I look forward to her reflections and report on the Conference and to her advice on how we should proceed on the road ahead. There has been discussion in our own government and within the private sector about how and when our Ambassadors should be selected for subsequent World Radiocommunication Conferences. This is not the time nor place to wade into this question in any detail, other than to say that in the months ahead, we would benefit, I believe, from discussing the hows and whens of getting our next Ambassador on board in a way that he or she can be most effective. Our country has been fortunate in the caliber of individuals selected for this position, managing to overcome the process shortfalls that seem inevitably to accompany the appointment. But maybe there are ways to enhance the process so that we don't have to trust to good luck to help select someone next time worthy to follow in Ambassador Obuchowski's footsteps. I hope that the Ambassador will give us the benefit of her judgments on this in the months ahead. For today, I am proud to join in saluting Janice for the high caliber of her service to the nation.

I also want to mention the important formative role of my friend Ambassador David Gross in the events leading up to and through the Conference. My stay in Geneva coincided with his -- always a happy event from my vantage-point -- and all of us owe David special thanks for everything he did -- and will be doing to implement the results of the WRC-03.

Permit me also to recognize the important contribution of the private sector in the planning and execution of this Conference. They began working on the 2003 Conference as soon as the previous Conference was completed. They worked long and hard to assist in preparation of the agenda, the preparation of positions on the issues, and strategy design for obtaining our country's objectives. None of this is easy, even under the best of circumstances. But nowadays, given all the down-sizing corporate offices have undergone and the urgency of basic survival issues, it becomes even more of a challenge, and we are all very much in debt to our private sector colleagues for their contribution to what has just occurred.

Last but certainly not least is our own FCC Team. Under Don Abelson's watchful and caring eye, it performed with skill and success. There were many people who contributed mightily to what was accomplished, and time precludes me from mentioning each one. But I was deeply impressed with the negotiating skills of both John Giusti and Alexander Roytblat during the several bilateral meetings I participated in. Lauren Van Wazer not only staffed her issues but made lots of friends for the U.S. in Geneva. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Julie Barrie who shepherded me through some very busy days in Geneva. She knew the issues, the players and the logistical imperatives of the Conference, and she made my time there not only productive for me, but enjoyable, too. To the other FCC delegates, to the Home Team under the direction of

Linda Dubroof, to Rod Porter and Kathryn O'Brien, and to Ambassador Obuchowski's Assistant Chris Murphy, my thanks for a job well done. I also want to recognize my hard-working colleague, Commissioner Abernathy, for throwing herself into a busy schedule of bilaterals, individual delegation meetings and other events with that special enthusiasm and energy that she brings to everything she does.

Put it all together, Mr. Chairman, and I think we had an event here in which you can take great pride, and I want to recognize the priority you attached to WRC-03 and the leadership you gave to our participation in it.