

**REMARKS OF  
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS  
NETWORK RELIABILITY AND INTEROPERABILITY COUNCIL VII  
MARCH 30, 2004**

Good morning. I join Chairman Powell in welcoming you here and in thanking you for being a part of this newly-constituted NRIC. I'm going to be very brief and say only three things.

First, there is no work that this Commission does anywhere across the whole broad gamut of our involvements that matches in importance our responsibilities to ensure the safety and workability of our nation's communications systems in the face of homeland security and emergency preparedness. The very first sentence of the Communications Act tells us that the Act was written to make "available . . . a rapid, efficient, Nation-wide and world-wide telecommunications service . . . for the purpose of the national defense, for the purpose of promoting safety of life and property through the use of wire and radio communication." This seventy-year old statute couldn't be more timely than it has been in the days since September 11, 2001. Getting this right—making sure our communications systems work when the going gets tough and lives are at stake—there's nothing else that we do that rises to *that* level. By joining NRIC, you have bought into this challenge, you are a part of it, and you have undertaken critically important work that may very well become highly visible and intensely examined as time moves on.

Second, we have a long ways to go to in building systems interoperability and in making sure back-up systems exist if one system goes down. This is in no way to deride any of the good work that has been done since September 11, and some good things have been accomplished. It is rather to remind ourselves that this is an awesome undertaking that requires constant attention and never-ending work. I have visited with many police, fire, public safety and health care responders over the past several months, trying to find out where we really are in terms of making our systems truly interoperable and redundant. I'll just say we have a *long* ways to go, and probably not much time to get there.

I know that E911 is an important part of this NRIC's agenda. Americans have long believed that help was just a 911 call away. As network architectures evolve away from the PSTN model with numbers as universal identifiers, we are challenged to ensure this remains a reality in the age of IP communications. In the near term, too, there are challenges that have dogged us for too long. Identifying ways to provide location information to PSAPs for calls originating from multi-line telephone systems comes immediately to mind. I'm glad you will be focusing on this, but I'm also pleased to see that your charter doesn't abandon your past good works and specifically charges you to continue to build on the homeland security, wireless reliability and broadband deployment best practices of your NRIC predecessors. These need to be implemented and I don't believe that can be done without them being closely monitored and constantly

evaluated and updated when necessary. Best practices don't always implement themselves, and here they must be implemented.

Third, I can't emphasize enough the urgency I feel about all this. Anyone who thinks this country is through with terror is, I believe, deluding themselves. Events of the past month overseas should only deepen our concern. So I'd urge you to look at your work plan and see if it can be accelerated, see if reports can be prepared ahead of schedule and actions implemented even sooner than planned. If you need more help or resources, tell us. If you think you or the Commission needs more authority to accomplish what needs to be accomplished, tell us that, too, so we can figure out how to proceed with the Congress.

This is preeminently a time for business and government to work together. This is a concept that, now more than ever, needs our full embrace. This is how, in fact, we built this great country of ours and how we protected it against so many previous threats to our national security. It's when we work together that America does its greatest work. And that's exactly the kind of partnering we need now—and it's the role that this council is well-suited to play. So I won't detain you any further from your work, but I did want to stop by and thank you for your willingness to participate in this important process and to tell you how important I think it is and how anxious we are to work closely with you. We're looking to you for a lot.