

Remarks of
Michael K. Powell
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission
At the
FCC Wireless Broadband Forum
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I want to take the opportunity to welcome all of you here to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for this very important forum on broadband and particularly on the promise that wireless holds for bringing the great benefits of broadband to all Americans.

We have been talking as a community about broadband for years now: the recognition of the Internet; and of the promise that it holds for Americans and citizens everywhere. But as we move into this year, we really begin to see the intensifying recognition at all levels of government, the promise that broadband holds for any nation that hopes to remain competitive and globally significant in the world of the information age and the world of the future.

That recognition is punctuated by our leaders increasingly setting out ambitious goals for this nation to reach. The President of the United States recently talked about wanting broadband availability for all Americans by 2007. A truly bold and ambitious goal is going to be difficult to meet. It only will be met by the use of every possible tool in our broadband tool kit. It will be critical that wireless play a major role in our ability to provide these benefits to the American consumer.

This is the central communication policy objective of the era. It's more than talk now. It is time for action, and these forums are a unique and important way to bring together critical communities to identify issues, to develop solutions, and to highlight important questions for Government as it develops a spectrum policy that's respectful and efficient and productive for the broadband goals that we hope to achieve.

It is becoming clear what the benefits of a constructive broadband policy and broadband success are to the Nation. For the American consumer we have a simple goal: we want to be able to provide this critical plug in to an information appliance and an information age to every single American no matter where that American chooses to set up their family and live and to do so at affordable rates regardless of our own socio-demographic class.

That issue has always proven to be difficult and sometimes impenetrable using the technologies of the past. For a hundred years, we hauled copper wire over mountains and through rivers and through valleys and over poles to try to reach this objective using a single technology. But that's what holds so much promise as we move into the future. We're able to use other technologies that will make that challenge more manageable. A satellite cares very little about those demographic differences. Wireless can bridge distances that wireline functions can't. Wireless has unique opportunities for interactivity and mobility that other technologies don't. So as we begin to sort of put this together for consumers we see wireless as a critical component to that.

I think also that anybody who cares about the economic well-being of their nation has begun to see the critical value of investing in broadband infrastructure and information technologies. The United States has been able to steadily increase its global economic productivity almost exclusively because of its continuing willingness to invest in information technology.

Indeed, the United States had an extraordinary productive growth at the end of the last year directly attributable to our investments in the Internet and information technologies of the 90's. If the United States is going to maintain its ability to grow its economy, I think the continued proliferation of broadband technologies - - with wireless playing a critical part - - is key to that solution. Productivity and growth will make our world a better place for our children and that makes our task more daunting and important.

In the area of safety and security, as we all have come to be aware in the post-911 world, we are vulnerable. We are not blessed as much as we once were by geography. We can't take for granted the safety and security that we have come to enjoy in our generation. We understand that as an economy moves into an information age, its dependence on critical information infrastructure intensifies, and as it intensifies, indeed, we become both benefited and more vulnerable to problems in that network.

We have a historic opportunity, as we engineer networks for the next great era of communications, to be cognizant of the need for safety and security at the front end of the engineering problem. It's important to be thinking about first responders and public safety now, not later. It is important to be talking about how to secure networks and encrypt them to protect them from those who would rather do you harm or gain access to information inappropriately.

Too often, I think, in public policy we are working on those things on the back end of the deployment or we're bolting them on at the end. Let's be cognizant at the front end for the good of our citizens.

Wireless is vital to our goal. The best way to achieve the benefits that we're talking about is to not rest on any single technology. I will give anybody who has the possibility, the opportunity and the entrepreneurial spirit to develop a broadband platform, the chance to bring it to market and deploy it to consumers. This is not an agenda just for a phone company, just for a cable company, just for a big wireless company. It is also a forum for entrepreneurs, innovators, and radical creators of new goods and services and it's the Commission's mission to try to drive any platform that can deliver these services and deliver them effectively.

The great regulatory difficulty over the past one hundred years is because we have always had just one wire to the home. And because of that one wire you had enormous difficulties of monopoly control, bottleneck facilities, the pricing of those facilities, and how to get that one wire to every home in the United States.

We have a historic opportunity here not to repeat that world. We have the opportunity for not one, we're clearly going to have two: DSL, and cable modem are well on their way.

But the Holy Grail is when you get to three. Magical things happen in competitive markets when there are three. Magical things happen when there is real choice and pressures for

innovation. And we are looking for a “We want you” poster up here for the third great access, and indeed the fourth or fifth, for the American consumer. And we all know that wireless rests somewhere in that solution to create that competitive world and to take pressure off the regulatory environment for creating the market benefits that that dynamic can produce.

We’re already beginning to see it. I don’t need to catalogue, for this community, the explosive growth all over the country - - everything from Wi-Fi technologies to wireless internet service providers that are popping up, particularly in rural America. We’re beginning to see greater uses of wireless mobile broadband products, such as EvDO coming into the market place. This is not science fiction anymore. These are true commercial applications that are rapidly spreading throughout the market place.

But what is more exciting is that there are a number of dramatic wireless technologies on the way. We see creative uses of OFDM, WCDMA, WiMax, and Ultra Wideband. Products that just a few years ago very few had ever heard of are now beginning to work their way through the commercial system and are beginning to produce real product for consumers.

So the future is exciting, innovative and bright, and we look forward to wireless being part of that solution. The FCC has recognized for years now that spectrum is vital to realizing this vision and that it had to have a bolder more enlightened national spectrum policy. From day one, we have been working hard to change the traditional “command and control” approach that does not respect innovation and the need to move spectrum to its highest and best uses. We have been working hard to provide a spectrum policy that is much more facilitating of more platforms, more broadband platforms, more innovation, more choice and more flexibility.

Put simply, our view is that more spectrum, more flexibility and more innovation will equal more broadband, and a brighter information landscape, and that’s the core of our policy.

Just to mention a few of the big items that we have looked at and are looking at.

Advanced Wireless Services: Just last year the Commission allocated an additional ninety megahertz of spectrum that can be used for advanced wireless services. The flexible rules for this band were established in October and we hope to auction the spectrum by sometime next year.

MDS and ITFS: We’ve been working very, very hard to develop new rules to provide less complicated and more flexible structure for the MDS and ITFS band. We expect to release these rules sometime this summer.

The 70, 80, 90 Megahertz Bands: The Commission has established an innovative framework for allowing commercial use of spectrum in those bands. These bands have been opened up to allow for the use of more innovative technologies that will lead to new products and services being available, such as high-speed, point-to-point wireless LANS and offerings that will increase broadband services.

24 Gigahertz Auction: The auction of spectrum license in the 24 gigahertz band that can be used to provide a range of fixed broadband services is going to begin on July 28th.

Secondary Markets: We have promoted the use of secondary markets for people that have more commercial flexibility in obtaining spectrum and allocating spectrum. Further, our spectrum leasing initiative will make spectrum more easily accessible to wireless operators interested in serving niche markets.

Rural America: In our rural Report and Order, we are considering additional flexibility in our licensing and service rules for rural America, for example by allowing higher power limits, and creating smaller license areas in order to decrease infrastructure costs to rural providers.

Unlimited Spectrum in the 5 Gigahertz Band: We've made an additional 255 megahertz of spectrum available in the 5.470-5.725 GHz band for unlicensed devices that will promote growth and innovation in wireless broadband services, including services offered by Wireless Internet Service Providers.

Smart Cognitive Radios: We're working very aggressively on new technologies like smart radio that will provide really new and creative technological solutions to spectrum scarcity and can open up more possibilities. We're working to open the door for these technologies so as not to shut out any of their tremendous potential.

So the bottom line is all the raw material is there, the recognition is there, and the understanding of its importance has begun to gel. Now all that is left is the easy part of actually making it happen, and that's what this forum is one small part of - - bringing the stakeholders together who know how to make it happen and to leave this room better than we found it this morning. Hopefully in a few years we will be looking back quite proudly of our accomplishments knowing that we put the country and the world on a better, more competitive footing in a world that our children will enjoy for years to come.

I'm excited to be a part of it excited to have you here and want to thank you for your service.

Thank you very much.