

SEPARATE STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN

Re: Second Periodic Review of the Commission's Rules and Policies Affecting the Conversion to Digital Television, Report and Order

This item appropriately moves the digital television transition forward. It establishes a staggered channel election process to arrive at a final channel assignment for broadcasters. Along the way, we worked hard to ensure that broadcasters have as much ability as possible to make informed judgments consistent with our overarching goal of speeding the transition and bringing enhanced digital viewing to consumers. We recognize that further work is needed to address low power stations and international border coordination. We advance innovation through distributed transmission technologies. We open up technical avenues for enhancements to v-chip and closed captioning technologies. And we continue to monitor efforts to improve consumer information. Each of these steps advances the transition and adds further clarity, certainty, and transparency to the process.

While I'm pleased that we march on with the mechanics of the digital transition, I am puzzled why we have not yet provided broadcasters and the public with a concrete understanding of broadcasters' public interest obligations in the digital age.

This necessary piece of the transition continues to lag further and further behind. Congress made clear that broadcasters continue to have public interest obligations in the digital world, but left it up to the Commission to specify how those should be applied. As we continue to speed the arrival of the best possible digital television service to the public, several proceedings that could bring certainty continue to linger at the Commission. More than four years ago the Commission inquired generally how it should update broadcasters' public interest obligations for the digital age. In September 2000, the Commission followed with specific proceedings to update children's television obligations and to standardize and enhance broadcasters' disclosure of public files. In this periodic review, we sought additional comment on these proceedings and stated our goal of bringing them to a prompt conclusion. Yet no further action has been taken on any of those proceedings.

We've had more than ample time to bring the public interest into the transition. Parents are eager to know what opportunities the transition will bring to their children. Candidates should be able to use the Internet to quickly determine the political advertising landscape of a given station. Broadcasters should welcome the opportunity to showcase their local civic and public affairs coverage on their websites. The digital age offers tremendous opportunities for both broadcasters and the public. Multicasting and other new horizons in digital broadcasting should correspond to new horizons in serving the public interest.

A new era in broadcasting is taking shape now. The vast bulk of broadcasters are now broadcasting digitally, with hundreds broadcasting multiple programming streams. We owe it to the public and to broadcasters to devote sufficient time and resources of this Commission to establishing concrete, measurable public interest obligations to fulfill Congress's vision of this enhanced digital viewing experience. Let's not leave the public behind as we continue finalizing the blueprints for digital television.