

Statement of FCC Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein

Before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Nominations Hearing

November 18, 2004

Mr. Chairman, Senator Hollings, and Members of the Committee, thank you for convening this hearing. I am grateful for the encouragement and leadership you have provided, both during my two years as an FCC Commissioner and also my fifteen years on staff in the Senate.

I am especially indebted to many of you for offering strong bipartisan support for my renomination, which is why I am sitting before you today.

One Senator you know well has gone to extraordinary lengths to make this possible: my mentor, my friend, and one of the finest men ever to grace the Senate, Tom Daschle. He has had the confidence to recommend me to the President for this position twice. For that and numerous other kindnesses over the years, I shall forever remain in his debt.

Senator Daschle worked tirelessly to ensure that as the first FCC Commissioner from South Dakota and the entire upper Midwest, I could continue to help ensure that all consumers, including those in Rural America, remain connected.

In that effort, a bipartisan chorus of support from our state has joined him, and I am grateful to Governor Mike Rounds, PUC Chairman Bob Sahr, and to many others for their support.

These efforts say something special about Rural America. Growing up a fourth-generation South Dakotan, with long winters and people scattered over large distances, I learned the value of all of us staying connected, to each other and to the rest of the country.

That experience drives me to work hard to fulfill the Communications Act's promise for innovative communications technologies and services that are widely available to everyone in this country. These goals become even more imperative as communications takes an ever more prominent role in our personal lives and in our global economic competitiveness. With advances in technology and today's security environment, I will also continue to put the communications needs of our public safety and national security communities at the forefront.

The telecommunications industry is at a crossroads, driven by the rise of broadband and its revolutionary implications. From telecommuting, to distance learning, to high definition video, to telemedicine, broadband breaks through geographic barriers and transforms communities. We must continue to encourage broadband deployment by increasing incentives for investment and promoting competition. We can do both with a policy framework that is flexible and keeps pace with rapid technological changes.

To promote these benefits for everyone in this country, I have focused on improving spectrum management, modernizing universal service, and protecting diversity, competition, and localism in our media.

Spectrum will be the lifeblood for much of this new communications landscape. I have set out an approach I call a “Framework for Innovation” that establishes ground rules for issues like interference, while, to the greatest extent possible, allowing innovation in the marketplace to drive the development of spectrum-based services. My goal is to maximize the communications and information that flow over the nation’s airwaves. We have achieved remarkable results, on a bipartisan basis, by improving our spectrum management policy. The marketplace has responded with an explosion of new opportunities for consumers, like wi-fi and new licensed wireless broadband services.

Our entire country gains economic, social, and civic benefits from being connected to a seamless “network of networks.” I have worked hard to preserve and advance Congress’s universal service programs. It is vital that these programs remain on solid footing. Increasingly, voice, video, and data will flow to homes and businesses over broadband platforms. In this new world, we must promote a comprehensive rollout to all Americans, including those from rural, insular, and other high-cost areas, Native Americans and other minorities, people with disabilities, non-English speakers, and low-income consumers.

As for the media, I have never forgotten that the airwaves belong to the American people, and that it is critical to preserve their access to what the Supreme Court has called the “uninhibited marketplace of ideas.” The FCC should continue to promote the priorities that have always formed the basis of our public interest policy as envisioned by Congress: diversity, competition and localism.

Congress has charged the Commission with ensuring that the American public stays well-connected and well-protected. If confirmed, I will continue to work with each of you to implement these Congressional imperatives.