

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: *Implementation of Section 621(a)(1) of the Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984 as amended by the Cable Television Protection and Competition Act of 1992*

There is no doubt in my mind that more competition in the delivery of video services would bring significant benefits to consumers. When people have more options, they reap big rewards—better services, higher technology and, critically, lower prices. This is precisely why Congress laid out the goal of promoting competition so clearly in the Communications Act.

Cable and telephone companies are beginning to compete to offer consumers the much-heralded triple play—bundles of telephone, video and Internet services. Cable companies have already jumped into the voice service market, and telephone companies are entering the video fray. This crossover is exciting, and it means that old industry boundaries are eroding, giving way to a new and hopefully more consumer-friendly future.

The Communications Act provided a process for entry into the video services marketplace under which cable operators must secure franchises. This process recognizes the important role that franchising authorities play—ensuring public health, safety and welfare; preventing economic red-lining; managing public rights-of-way; and ensuring access for public, educational and governmental channels.

This system has generally worked for consumers, incumbent cable operators and municipalities. It also appears to be working in numerous communities for new entrants. It is important that it works for new entrants if we are going to be able to reap the rewards that competition brings to consumers. In the current environment, it may be that some changes are called for, and certainly we have an ongoing obligation to consider ways to improve the process. That is why we initiate this proceeding today. If we find hard record evidence of problems that need to be repaired, and can be repaired within the parameters of the existing law, then the Commission must consider taking those steps. I would also note that there is Congressional interest in looking more broadly at how the statute itself is accommodating new marketplace developments.

What this Commission decides about the specific issues before it will be significantly influenced by the record this notice elicits, and that is why we seek a full record and why I emphasize the importance of widespread participation in the proceeding. Until we obtain a full record, I do not believe the results of this proceeding are foreordained. At the end of the day, I am hopeful we can develop a thoughtful and balanced approach, one recognizing that local input and diversity are values we are always charged to nurture even as we meet our responsibilities to encourage consumer-friendly competition by promoting more choices in the video services market.