

**REMARKS OF  
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS  
RELEASE OF CONSUMER SURVEY  
ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERNET  
WASHINGTON, DC  
JANUARY 18, 2006**

I want to extend my thanks to the Consumer Federation of America, Free Press and Consumers Union for the valuable and informative study they are releasing today. These three groups have done so much to inform our national discussions about both telecommunications and media issues, and today we recognize another very helpful contribution from them. So I join in thanking you for this contribution. The data that you have collected—describing how consumers use the Internet and how highly they value its openness—make clear this is an important national issue.

We all take pride in the Internet. We view the Internet as a place of freedom and openness where innovation can flourish and new worlds are opened. We point to it as an example of how things ought to work. Because from its inception, the beauty of the Internet has been simple—consumers can pretty much go where they want to go and do what they want to do.

But if we are not careful, we will miss the signs that there are threats to the openness that makes the Internet so great. Telltale clues are out there. News reports—from *Business Week* to *The Wall Street Journal* to *The New York Times*—have sounded warning bells, suggesting a future where new broadband toll bridges may restrict the use of services like VoIP or make it difficult to watch videos or listen to music over the web. It's not impossible to imagine these things taking place. Because the more concentrated our facilities providers grow, the more they have the ability, and possibly even the incentive, to act as Internet gatekeepers—unduly influencing the flow or speed of Internet traffic, ultimately perhaps dictating who can use the Internet and for what purposes.

Our open, vibrant and free-wheeling Internet is the last place where we should tolerate gatekeeper controls. It wasn't built to be that way and we must not allow it to develop that way.

The survey being released here today shows that we will likely face the wrath of American consumers if we let that happen. Consumers are telling us they don't want to be forced to pay for services they don't use; they don't want to be denied the use of their preferred ISP; and they don't want their broadband provider to block content or degrade access to the full bounty that the Internet offers. In short, they don't want to see their access to the creativity and innovation that literally rages on the Internet hemmed in by policies that do not respect its fundamental openness.

So I welcome this study. And I hope it will generate additional research to give us a better understanding of how the policy choices we make today will influence the coming broadband generation of Internet content, applications and services. We need

real data, real studies like this one, to ensure that we get it right. I'll tell you what else we need—we need a good, participatory national dialogue on these issues because they affect each and every citizen of this great land. These are not esoteric, inside-the-Beltway issues—they go to the very core of what kinds of opportunities are going to be available to us and our children in this digital age. Your study shows there is already widespread citizen concern about this issue, so this is preeminently the time for all of us to engage. Out of such discussions will come creative solutions, policies that safeguard the free, open and dynamic Internet and that provide the needed incentives for the broadband penetration that this country so urgently needs. I look forward to working with my colleagues at the Commission, with all of you gathered here today, and with every American—and their numbers are legion—who has a stake in how all this turns out.

Thank you.