

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: *Establishment of the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau and Other Organizational Changes*

My hope is that when we look back on this proposed reorganization years down the road, it will be seen as the first step in putting the FCC out front, where it long should have been, in providing communications security for all Americans in this dangerous age. It's been almost five years since the tragedy of 9/11 and we know this: America is not as ready it could be for the next attack should that awful day come—and many experts believe it will indeed come. For me, and I suspect all my colleagues and many others in this room, the passage of time has not dulled the searing images of that day, nor our sense of revulsion at the sheer barbarity of the attack and the senseless loss of more than 3000 lives. But neither does the passage of time bring comfort that we have made sufficient progress in building the kind of comprehensive communications response system America needs.

Much the same point was driven home by the chaos that ensued in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. As wind and water engulfed New Orleans, public safety officials from across the country selflessly made their way to the Gulf Coast to offer their help and assistance. Too often their efforts were hamstrung by lack of reliable, secure and interoperable communications systems. Often they couldn't even contact one another. Before long, hurricane season will be upon us again. Whether it's the wrath of terrorists or the wrath of nature, time is not our friend.

I have said many times that with homeland security, business as usual is not acceptable. That includes the business of this Commission. The very first sentence of the Communications Act gives us all the charge we need. It tells us that an important part of our job is to make “available . . . a rapid, efficient, Nation-wide and world-wide telecommunications service . . . for the purpose of the national defense, for the purpose of promoting safety of life and property through the use of wire and radio communication.” What more did we need? This seventy two-year-old statutory provision couldn't be more timely. Reorganizing the FCC to address this charge is not only supported by the statute; it makes eminent good sense. We have the nation's foremost experts on communications technology working right here. Combining their know-how with adequate resources and priority focus—if properly executed—can only yield good results. So I am pleased that the Chairman is moving ahead and taking this important step. I have long thought a separate, highly visible and well-organized Bureau was the right way to go.

The new Bureau will have a heavy and somber charge. It will be responsible for communications public safety, homeland security, national security, emergency management and disaster management and preparedness. What we must do goes far beyond reshuffling and remodeling existing resources. It goes to a new sense of urgency and action. It goes to real-world results. So we will measure the Bureau's success not by what we begin today, but by the concrete steps we implement to encourage reliable,

redundant and interoperable emergency communications systems. The challenge is enormous. But unless we are at the forefront of ensuring communications interoperability for our first responders, we will be doomed to repeat the tragedies of the past. We will measure the Bureau's success by the cooperation we build between industry, public safety and all concerned stakeholders. And we will measure its success by deploying our Commission assets to assist others in the efforts they are making.

This latter point is perhaps less obvious, but it is to me critically important. The new Bureau could make a significant contribution to the extent that it acts as a facilitator and expediter to help public safety organizations and first responders coordinate with both government and industry. Let me give just one example. We need to ensure that our hospitals and medical care providers are integral parts of a nation-wide emergency communications system. This is an absolute necessity when you consider the havoc that another hurricane or a bio-terror attack can wreak. Yet the expertise and resources necessary to achieve this vary widely among our medical facilities. Some have made great progress. Others have made little. Why should every hospital across this broad land have to start at square one, devising its own plan, developing its options, figuring out how to implement a program, as if no one else has been down this road before? How much better it would be if they could call someone—say the FCC—and talk to experts who could tell them what has been tried and works and what has been tried and doesn't work, and give them a hand along the way. Think of the time and expense—and maybe even lives—we could save by facilitating this kind of preparation.

We will be able to claim success, too, if this Bureau works with all jurisdictions to make the full deployment of E911 services a reality in every corner of this country. This is a crisis that we need to find creative ways to address.

The FCC should be front and center when it comes to safeguarding this nation's communications security. To the extent we aren't, we fail our charge. I am not now, and never have been, in favor of waiting for others to do our job. And it strikes me today, looking back at his commendable leadership in the aftermath of last year's hurricane season, that Chairman Martin isn't, either. I know he and my other colleagues are deeply committed to the road we head down today. This reorganization, once put in place, provides a framework for action. It is an important first step. We should have taken it four and a half years ago. But now the task is to move forward because there is such an incredible amount of work to do, and because we are talking about challenges to our very safety and survival.

So I welcome this Order. I am pleased to support it. And I want to thank all the people at this agency who have already worked long and hard in the name of public safety and homeland security. I hope our actions today will give them the tools and visibility they need to maximize their efforts on behalf of the American people.