

**STATEMENT OF  
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: *Children's Television Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters* (MM Docket No. 00-167), Second Order on Reconsideration and Second Report and Order

Kids today live in a super-saturated media environment. They are interacting with more media more often than at any other time in our nation's history. Television, radio, cable and now the Internet are perhaps the most powerful forces at work in the world today. When used for good, they enlighten minds, convey powerful ideas, educate and lay the foundation for human development. But when they are used to misinform and mislead they can—and sometimes do—inflict lasting harm.

We have reason to be concerned. The Kaiser Family Foundation tells us that children are spending over 6 ½ hours per day exposed to media, almost 4 hours of that time with television. The average child sees tens of thousands of commercials a year. More disturbing still are studies demonstrating that children 8 and younger don't—because they can't—distinguish between advertisements and programming. They accept commercials as true because they don't have the skills and cognitive resources to distinguish between fact and fiction.

Congress recognized these tough challenges for parents and the high stakes for children long ago. More than that, Congress made clear that broadcasters' public service responsibilities include providing programming that meets the needs of children. Indeed, in the Children's Television Act Congress specifically directed the Commission to protect children against excessive advertisements on television and required the Commission to consider during the license renewal process whether a station's programming has served the educational and informational needs of children.

Two years ago, the Commission began the task of updating our policies adopted under the Children's Television Act. The goal was simple: ensuring that our rules continue to serve the interests of children and parents as the country transitions from analog to digital television. With the February 17, 2009 transition now fixed in law, this effort has grown more urgent with each passing day.

We've had some fits and starts getting this digital children's agenda on the road. But I am pleased today to support this decision. It resolves at long last important outstanding issues regarding the obligation of television broadcasters to protect and serve the children in their audience. These range from digital core programming to limits on the display of Internet website addresses to restrictions on host selling—something to which children are particularly vulnerable.

We have reached this milestone because so many worked so hard to bring this effort to a successful conclusion. We especially owe a debt of gratitude to the key players in the children's media community and media companies who decided to get

together and hammer out a solution instead of engage in a lengthy legal tussle. Let me thank the signatories to the Joint Proposal that is the foundation of our effort today: the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, the National Parent Teacher Association, the Action Coalition for Media, Children Now, the United Church of Christ, the Association of National Advertisers, Viacom, CBS, the Walt Disney Company, Fox, NBC Universal and NBC Telemundo, Time Warner, 4Kids Entertainment and Discovery Communications. Let me also thank others like the National Association of Broadcasters and the National Cable and Telecommunications Association for jumping in along the way to support the proposal. There is no doubt that this item will advance the quality and quantity of children's programming.

But our work on the digital transition remains unfinished. We are overdue for a similarly constructive dialogue on the more general public interest obligations of digital television broadcasters. The vast majority of television stations are already broadcasting in digital. Others are already multicasting. But our signals are crossed when it comes to what broadcasters must do to discharge their public interest duties in the digital age. We have yet to provide the kind of clear guidance broadcasters need and viewers deserve. So it's time to address now how the digital transition can enhance political discourse, improve access to the media for those with disabilities, and increase localism, diversity and competition on the people's airwaves. It's also time to commit to a disclosure policy for digital television broadcasters.

It has, after all, been eight years since a blue-ribbon Presidential advisory committee first made recommendations regarding broadcasters' digital public interest obligations. It has been nearly seven years since the Commission first opened a proceeding on this issue. And it has been nearly a year since the Commission's own Consumer Advisory Committee called for swifter action in this area. If the American people are ever going to realize the full benefits of digital television, then this agency has a duty to call these remaining digital public interest issues forward and accord them the high priority they deserve. Without such action, the digital transition will fall far short of its promise.

Again, let me thank the public interest and industry players who worked so hard to see today's decision through. Thanks also to the Bureau staff who have worked on this issue over the last few years. We appreciate your commitment and are grateful for your efforts on behalf of our nation's children.