

**Remarks of Commissioner Michael J. Copps  
DTV Consumer Education Workshop  
September 26, 2007**

Good afternoon. I want to welcome you all to the FCC to discuss these vital issues. Thank you for getting involved in this great challenge. My only regret is that this workshop wasn't convened a year ago. As many of you know, I believe that we are dangerously behind the curve in preparing the American people for the end of analog television. February 17, 2009 is less than 17 months away, and, as the poet said, we have miles to go before we sleep.

Everyone in this room should have one overriding goal – to make sure that no television viewer wakes up to a blank screen on February 18, 2009. Given the stakes – not only for television viewers but for so many others – including the public safety community and wireless service providers about to bid on the 700 MHz spectrum – one would think that by now educating the public about the transition would have long since been a major national priority.

Well, not yet. I was heavily involved in the Y2K effort. I know what it looks like when something is a national priority. There's a goal, then there's a strategy, then there are tactics to get it done. There is daily coordination at the highest levels. There is accountability, clarity in the lines of authority, and funding to get the job done. Now, some people say Y2K was a massive non-event, and the lesson they draw is that we over-reacted. Well, my view is that we'll never get these things exactly right. We can either do too much or too little. Put me down on the side of doing too much. I'd love for a non-event on that February 2009 morning. Right now we're not on the road to a non-event. We're on the road to a cold winter blizzard of outraged consumers.

So it's time to start engaging the American public in a serious and coordinated way. Web sites and pamphlets are fine, but they're not going to get the job done. The best way to reach television viewers is through television programming. I note that the cable industry has launched an on-air campaign and the broadcasters will now be announcing next month. I commend those and other voluntary efforts to get the word out.

But this transition is too important to be left to chance or patchwork decisions by individual licensees. We cannot afford to have some licensees in a presidential election year decide that they can make more money selling political ads and figuring that someone else can pick up the DTV transition outreach slack. We need to know what the programming plans are. We need to know when and where PSAs are running. We need to know whether broadcast and cable efforts are actually reaching the communities that are particularly at risk. And we need to be able to redirect our efforts quickly if necessary.

Someone needs to coordinate and oversee that effort. In Y2K we had an Inter-Agency Task Force, headed out of The White House. That'd be great, but absent that, it seems to me that the FCC is the only entity in a position to get the job done.

We have a lot to do over the next 17 months, and there is a role for all of us – government, industry and private citizens. Working together that way is how we always overcome our greatest challenges. Let's try that here. We have one chance to get this right. It's late, but hopefully not too late.