

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS, DISSENTING**

Re: *Inquiry Concerning the Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans in a Reasonable and Timely Fashion and Possible Steps to Accelerate Such Deployment Pursuant to Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996*, GN Docket No. 07-45, Fifth Report (Mar. 19, 2008)

It's no secret to most people here that I have not been leading the cheers for previous editions of our Section 706 reports. Based on a paucity of data – mostly primitive and generally-unhelpful – these reports claim progress that simply did not reflect reality. The data lacked a plausible definition of broadband, employed stunningly meaningless zip code measurements concerning its geographic distribution, ignored the prices people paid for broadband completely, and for years failed to look at what other countries were doing to get broadband deployed to their people. As I noted the last time we issued a section 706 Report, way back in September 2004:

“America’s competitors around the world are implementing comprehensive broadband plans. Countries like Japan, Korea, and Canada have left us far behind. This is unacceptable. Broadband is our central infrastructure challenge. High-capacity networks are to the Twenty-first century what roads, canals and railroads were to the Nineteenth and highways and basic telecommunications were to the Twentieth. Our economy and our future will be driven by how quickly and completely we deploy broadband.

That is why Congress charged the FCC with promoting broadband deployment for all Americans—whether they live in rural areas, inner cities or tribal lands; whether they are affluent or of limited income; whether they live with or without disabilities. Recently, we heard an announcement from the very top of our government that our goal is universal broadband access by 2007. But we are not making acceptable progress toward that goal. Yes, there are good stories in these glossy pages. Schools and libraries enjoy broadband access like never before. New technologies offer new promise. Strides are being made in some rural communities. Companies are working hard.

Still, one glaring fact stands out: the United States is ranked eleventh in the world in broadband penetration! [Note: we’ve fallen to 15th in the interim.] This Report somehow finds that this is acceptable, and that our efforts are resulting in timely deployment.”

I could continue with the rest of my 2004 statement and it would sound as eerily applicable today as these first few paragraphs do. We can write reports that conclude that Americans are receiving broadband in a reasonable and timely fashion. But the facts are always there, glaring and staring us in the face, showing us where we really stand.

The fact is that your country and mine has never had any cognizable national broadband strategy to get the job done. So while broadband deployment is better than when I came to the FCC—I would surely hope so!—and the Commission may separately issue a report today showing improvements in broadband deployment, we've been working with one hand tied behind our backs, inhibited by the Commission's dependence on antiquated methodologies and less than rigorous analysis. I'm happy we're starting to change our benchmarks, but, my goodness, how late it is!

Just consider the fact that our international competitors deploy 25, 50 and 100 mbps broadband speeds at fractions of what it costs here in the United States. If consumers in Los Angeles or Washington pay \$40 per month for a 6 mbps connection while those in London or Tokyo pay multiples less for 50 or 100 mbps, just think of the costs and competition burdens this puts on American consumers and businesses.

Surely broadband has created many good new jobs in the United States. But, you know—and I haven't seen any statistics on this—it wouldn't surprise me that our lack of a real broadband strategy has helped out-source tens of thousands of jobs, probably more, rather than keeping them right here at home. Again, I don't know that this is true, but the fact that we can even raise such a question ought to scare us all.

So we should not be watching from the sidelines, letting the marketplace—still largely a cable-telco duopoly in most places—take its course. A national broadband strategy should include government and the private sector working together as it has always done to meet the great infrastructure challenges of the day. It means redefining the mission of Universal Service in the 21st century to mean broadband, just as Universal Service meant telephone service in the 20th century. It means incentives to build infrastructure, something we always managed to do in our nation's past but where we seem strangely reluctant to act when it comes to this perhaps most awesome-ever technology. We should be taking closer looks at and learning from the successes and failures of our global competitors. And we should be looking within our own borders to tap into the creative ideas being generated to meet the broadband needs of the Digital Age.

I think we can get there but we're going to have to do more than just issue self-satisfied reports and set high-minded goals. Until universal, affordable broadband is a top priority for the country no report will be able to mask the work still yet to be done. Hopefully the steps we take on broadband data-gathering in another item before us today will provide the basis for a better Section 706 Report next time around. But that is then, this is now, and I must respectfully dissent from this particular Report.