Remarks of Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein
One Web Day – 3rd Celebration
New America Foundation – September 22, 2008

Thanks, Nathan, for that kind introduction. And thanks for including me in this celebration of One Web Day. And what a breath of fresh air is Congresswoman Donna Edwards. This brainchild of Susan Crawford brings a needed focus on the importance of the Internet and on-line participation.

Broadband is a tool for innovation, education, political participation, and on-line activism - the likes of which we've never seen. And it is certainly a solution to vastly increase government transparency, although we haven't begun to maximize those opportunities.

Taking stock of where we are today is a little like taking a still picture of a speeding bullet. In some ways, it's hard to imagine that forty years have passed since that first transmission on the ARPANET between UCLA and Stanford Research Institute. It's been almost twenty years since Tim Berners-Lee first proposed the World Wide Web.

I was thrilled to attend his announcement last week at the Newseum of his launch of the World Wide Web Foundation. It can shed great light pointing the way to maximize the future of the Internet.

Thanks to Sir Tim, here we are today, with an estimated 178 million U.S. adults actively using the web. There are over 100 million websites operated worldwide. Some estimate that there are over 30 billion pages on the web, that consumers download 100 million files every day, and that they upload hundreds of thousands of new videos every day. All this, while 80 percent of the planet has yet to tap the Internet. We will need to level that out if we truly want to promote the spread of freedom and democracy around the world.

Clearly, our progress will increasingly be measured on a global scale. So, I'm glad that, while we celebrate here in DC – and in New York and Chicago -- there are also

celebrations going on in India, Serbia, Australia, and the Ukraine, among so many other places around the world.

I'd like to focus in on the importance of setting policy that fosters the best aspects of the Internet and that will help restore our country to a global leadership position in technology. That starts with a national broadband strategy.

Broadband has the power to revolutionize the way that we live, work, and participate in society. Broadband deployment is today's great infrastructure challenge. Broadband touches all the major issues being debated in the '08 election. It already has a striking impact on the economy – in terms of productivity, global competition, and outsourcing. It has tremendous potential for health care, through telemedicine, e-records, and home monitoring. It can transform education, through distance learning, access to museums & libraries, and stored content. We've got to tap broadband to meet our public safety needs, through interoperable networks and emergency alerts. It touches on the energy and environmental debates, as we look to telecommuting and smart electrical grids. And, it has transformational power for democracy, through citizen debates, avenue for political expression, and tools for citizen journalists and commentators.

Broadband may not be the top solution for any of these issues, but with its impact on so many key issues, it is critical to our future. So, we've got to make sure that it reaches everyone, no matter where they live, the color of their skin, or their educational background.

While we have made progress, we face great challenges. Consistent research shows that those with low incomes, seniors, minorities, and those in rural areas all trail behind in Internet access. As a country, we face major challenges in broadband adoption, competition, speed, and affordability. You know the stats: according to the ITU, we are 15th in broadband penetration. Contrary to some views, I believe broadband penetration does matter – we need to tap all our resources. Broadband is slower and more expensive in the U.S. than it is in the countries with which we compete internationally. Add it all up, and according to the ITIF's composite ranking of penetration, speed, and price, the

US ranks a lowly 15th. Critics will try to nitpick these studies, but what's clear is that the trend lines are bad. And consistently, the data tells us something is wrong. The bottom line is that even if US were #1 by all measures, which is where we belong, we still need to press in a public/private effort to stay on top, as technology evolves.

So, we've got to make this a higher national priority than it is today. We need a national broadband strategy. There is no doubt that the private sector will do the heaviest lifting. But is also a role for government, because we need everyone to benefit from this array of new services. We need to keep up with our global competitors. And we absolutely must protect Internet freedom.

Many of the elements of a national broadband strategy have been put on the table. But developing an effective strategy is not a simple, or prescriptive, exercise. It requires far greater focus from our policy leaders. It will take leadership at all levels of government -- from top to bottom -- at the federal, state, and local levels – and coordinated across agencies. And it will require broad participation from the many diverse communities of users. We truly need all players to work together to be successful.

A key element of any strategy must be preserving the open and interconnected nature of the Internet. One big reason we see such active political communities exploding online is because the Internet was founded on the principles of openness and neutrality. Consumers have historically been able to access the content of their choosing, run applications, and attach their choice of devices. It empowers consumers -- as citizen journalists, entrepreneurs, and artists -- it fosters collaboration (whether through wiki's or social networks) -- and is a vehicle for connectivity and transparency the likes of which we've never before seen. The very beauty of the Internet is that nobody's in charge and everybody's in charge.

Today, the movement for Internet freedom is tapping the same American spirit that fueled the movement against media consolidation. In an age when traditional media markets are dominated by a handful of giant conglomerates, we have optimism about

broadband. There is a sense it can restore decentralized, locally-rooted and entrepreneurial voices to the media landscape that are reflective of the best aspects of American media before consolidation.

This summer, at the FCC, we issued a landmark Order. For the first time, we made clear, though by a narrow majority, that we will enforce Federal law and the principles behind the Commission's Internet Policy Statement. Although I think we need to adopt rules to address concerns about network discrimination, the Commission's decision is an important step toward ensuring that consumers will continue to enjoy freedom on the Internet. By adopting a case-by-case approach, the FCC gave itself a degree of flexibility which may be helpful, but it also means that your attention to these issues and your vigilance are more important than ever. Let it be clear, the grass roots support of so many consumers – and consumer advocates – was critical to that outcome and is absolutely essential going-forward.

So, let's use today's celebration as a call to action: to promote openness, ensure interoperability, and foster affordable access and protect those elements of the Internet that have created such value you and opened so many doors. I am confident that, working together, we can achieve that goal. So, thank you for including me today and for all your involvement and leadership on the future of the Internet.