

**REMARKS OF ACTING CHAIRMAN MICHAEL J. COPPS TO THE  
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION STAFF  
WASHINGTON, DC  
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Thank you for joining me today here in the Commission meeting room or, for many, joining me virtually via closed circuit throughout the FCC. As most of you know by now, I was asked by President Obama to chair the FCC through its transition to new leadership—and I was pleased to accept. We have some very immediate challenges on the horizon that must be dealt with and also, going forward, some of the most exciting opportunities we have ever had to bring the wonders of communications to all our fellow citizens throughout the land. The business of this Commission goes on.

From this podium, over the past almost eight years, I have delivered statements and informal remarks, welcomed advisory committees and many different stakeholder groups, and interacted with innumerable workshops—but never have I felt such an important responsibility as I do today talking to all of you about how we, together, can galvanize and utilize the collective wisdom, expertise and talent that so abounds in this Agency to better serve the American people.

I am a believer, as many of you know, in public service. It is among the most honorable callings that any citizen can undertake. I have spent most of my nearly 39 years in Washington in public service—privileged and honored to work for a United States Senator (a really great one, by the way, Fritz Hollings from South Carolina, who did so much for this agency for so many years), for the Commerce Department as an Assistant Secretary, and more recently as a Commissioner at the FCC. I know that many of you feel exactly as I do about public service and that all of you have devoted a portion of your lives—some of you very large portions—to public service here at the FCC and elsewhere in government. Always be proud of that service.

This is such an important agency. So much of America's future depends upon the nation's success in bringing the opportunity-generating tools of modern communications to all our citizens. The FCC has been an essential part of shaping the communications landscape in our country for nearly 75 years. We haven't paused to think about it much, but 2009 is our Diamond Jubilee year because it was 1934 when President Franklin Roosevelt—my hero, incidentally—called upon Congress to establish the FCC as part of the New Deal. And, as recently as last week in his inaugural address, President Barack Obama called on the country to build the “digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together.” So today we face new challenges and new opportunities that make the FCC's role more important than ever. My purpose in asking to speak with you today is not to discuss a particular FCC policy or program. Instead, it is to focus on the Agency's most important asset—its people—and talk about what we can do together, as members of an elite team, to create opportunities for people through communications.

To succeed in our mission, the FCC must utilize its resources—especially its human resources—smartly and inclusively. And we must be credible not only in *what*

we do, but *how* we go about doing it. But I worry that in some important ways we haven't always been doing that. I am troubled that our lines of communication, both internal and external, seem to have frayed. Our credibility suffers when that happens. So the first thing we need to do as an organization is to improve our lines of communication, enhance the level of transparency in our work, and bring to our daily decisions the kind of openness that gives true credibility to everything we do.

Change needs to occur, for openers, in at least three distinct areas: how the various Bureaus and Offices work with each other; how the Commissioners communicate with one another and with the Bureaus; and how the Commission communicates with the public. Let me address each of these separately.

The Digital Age means we are living at a time of communications convergence where wireless, wireline and video communications are more and more intertwined. So too must there be convergence within the FCC. I don't mean this requires physically merging different offices, and even if it did, an Acting Chairmanship is not the mechanism to launch such a process. But it does require an open exchange of ideas in an effort to find solutions to the challenges confronting us. That progress can—that progress *must*—begin right away. There is no reason I can see for not having the various Bureaus and Offices more closely collaborating with each other on issues of mutual interest. As just one example, why not include the General Counsel's office, EB, CGB, OCBO and the Office of Workplace Diversity early on to help solve problems upfront rather than having to try and fix them on the back end after things have gone wrong? Communications is as cross-cutting as anything can be and the agency dealing with communications needs to be cross-cutting, too. If we can't communicate with ourselves, we shouldn't have the word "Communications" in our title.

I also believe there should be a renewed focus here on professional development. Speaking and writing opportunities should be encouraged whenever practicable, participation in FCC University applauded, and going the extra-mile rewarded by your peers and supervisors.

Second is how Commissioners and Bureaus communicate between and among themselves. In order for all of us to do our jobs well, make reasonable policy decisions, oversee the regulated industries under our purview, and represent American consumers, we must improve these lines of communication as well. To promote more openness, starting this coming week, we will have a weekly Chairman's Office Briefing with Bureau and Office chiefs, or their designees, and we will include a representative from each Commissioner's office. Opening up these meetings will, I am convinced, significantly improve the quality of our decision-making. It will also expedite the business of the Commission. I also want to ensure that my Commissioner colleagues have unfettered access to the Bureaus, with the presumption being that requests for information will be honored, and that there will be positive outreach from the Bureaus and Offices to them, with the presumption being that important information shouldn't have to be asked for—it should be provided. I realize this is not a bureau-created problem but, beginning now, requests from Commissioners' offices—not just the

Chairman's Office—should be answered directly and as quickly as possible, just as if the Chairman's Office is asking for it and without the need for running those requests through the Chairman's office first—the only exception I can currently think of being the very narrow one that such requests not be unusually time-consuming or necessitate an excessive juggling of Bureau or Office resources. In those cases, we will attempt to craft a workable solution.

Thirdly, and most critically, there are the actions we must take now to make the FCC more transparent, open and useful to the stakeholders that we serve. And when I say stakeholders, I include not just the industries that we regulate but, more importantly, all citizens—and here let me once again underline the word “all.” Regardless of whether a person is rich or poor, lives in a rural or urban area or on tribal lands, in affluence or is struggling just to get by, whether they have a disability or are senior citizens or college students, they are—each and every one of them—a stakeholder. The spectrum is theirs and the rest of us are stewards. No matter who it is, every citizen in this great land has a right to expect that we will keep them in the forefront of our attention and concern. It's what the public interest is all about.

So much potential advice and input, so much help we could be getting, from non-traditional stakeholders is out there, just waiting to be gleaned. I've seen it in countless communities and town hall meetings across the land, as well as in dozens of academic and professional and business circles. So much expertise and wisdom that can be ours for the asking and just for taking the time!

Here's another great source of input that we need to be smarter about—our FCC advisory committees. We have many of these, with hundreds of people willing to devote their time and energy to improving our processes and our decisions here. We have not begun to take full advantage of them. It is a missed opportunity to have some advisory committees totally out of action and the advice of others downplayed or even, unfortunately, ignored. We only make life more difficult for ourselves that way. We will all benefit from these committees' inputs. It is my hope that they become a more active force at the Commission, and my intention is to begin the process of their reinvigoration now.

This Commission should also be making its expertise and creative thought available to the outside world on a more regular basis. One way to do this is to produce high-quality, timely reports for Congress to inform the public policy dialogue—reports that are non-partisan, truly instructive and beyond reproach. Another important way to do this is through White Papers on a variety of public policy issues that would be put out for public consumption. These various reports and White Papers wouldn't speak for the Commission, but they would help people understand important communications issues and thereby enhance the communications dialogue that is so important to America's future. Such papers would also educate the media on important communications issues facing the country, and be another important source for both Congressional and Administration policy planning. So we will begin working to build a framework and develop priorities and procedures for such reports and papers.

In the weeks ahead, our three most important priorities will be, as you have heard me say already, DTV, DTV and DTV. We are already moving to improve coordination of the Commission's efforts, to deploy new ideas and resources, and to do whatever we can do, at this late date, to better focus our efforts to minimize what is certain to be considerable consumer disruption on February 18. It is no secret that I have always favored a more proactive and coordinated public-private partnership to fashion a seamless DTV transition. It's too late for that seamlessness now, but we have an obligation to do what we can in the three weeks remaining to minimize the dislocation and then, in the weeks following, to repair the things that didn't work. Should Congress extend the transition date, that will afford some additional and badly-needed time. I hope that time will be accompanied with some additional resources for the Commission's important work.

I know that many of you are directly involved in the planning and outreach efforts accompanying the DTV transition. You are doing yeoman's work and are owed a tremendous debt of gratitude. I appreciate all of the efforts made by those of you who volunteered and have been flying or driving to little known places and spending days away from your families in order to help. And I know that Commissioners Adelstein and McDowell, who have worked so hard and traveled to so many places in behalf of DTV education, share my sense of deep gratitude. Yet so much remains to be done, from the how-to of converter boxes to educating people about antennas and scanning, to getting the word out about the variabilities and peculiarities of digital signal coverage, and the list goes on. There are still millions of Americans who need help to understand what they need to do to ensure continued over-the-air television reception in the digital age. It is with this stark challenge in mind that I ask today for additional FCC volunteers to come forward and help. I'd love for you to put your name forward for membership in our DTV volunteer team. I include senior managers in this, too. And I am also asking that managers and supervisors try to accommodate those employees who are willing and able to help. If there is something more important than helping with the DTV transition that precludes a potential volunteer from contributing, fine, we will take that into consideration. But the presumption ought to be in favor of this work. Those who are brought onto the team will be working long and hard but they will be responding to a truly urgent priority.

Meanwhile, I understand that there are other things that will require our attention in the weeks ahead. Some things are on deadline and must be attended; other things are less than wildly controversial and we should be able to move on many of these without detracting from our DTV efforts; other issues can be teed up for future resolution. As just one example, we have sitting, in many nooks and crannies, backlogs of routine items from stakeholders seeking clarification or a license or some other non-hot button request. Some of these decisions might actually help boost our sagging economy, so they are timely and important. I would ask that you work with your supervisors to catalogue these items and develop a plan for addressing them at the Bureau level where appropriate and at the Commission level if need be.

Sometimes it is the little things that can make life easier on us here at the Commission. One of those little things is establishing a calendar for open meetings. Our next two full Commission meetings will occur on February 5 and March 5. Last but not least, the Commission has a wealth of resources on its website. Some of it is easy to find and use; much of it is, unfortunately, difficult to locate and even more difficult to use—for us at the Commission, and, worse, for the public at large. The Commission must update its website to be more user-friendly. While it will take time to re-do the entire website (and such efforts should culminate under permanent FCC leadership), we can and will proceed with the DTV page now and, in fact, folks have already started looking into how to reconfigure our DTV information and make it more user-friendly.

Let me give credit where credit is due. These ideas for reform are not solely mine. Many have been suggested by my colleagues and friends, Commissioner Adelstein and Commissioner McDowell. Others have been raised by the public. And indeed, one speech does not make everything better and certainly my role as Chairman for an interim period allows me only to begin this process. However, the changes I have outlined today are an essential down-payment on the reforms necessary to revitalize and reenergize this Agency. Much more will be needed and I may address some of this in the days and weeks ahead. Others will await our new leadership. I expect that a new Chairman will join the FCC in the relative near-term. It is my goal, with your help, to hand over an Agency that is more open, more transparent and more vibrant than it is today—one that is prepared to serve the many and diverse interests of the American people and thereby to advance the public interest—which must always be the Commission's North Star.

So let me stop here. As you can imagine, we have just about non-stop meetings going on as we attempt to get on top of all this and more, but I'm happy to take a question or two, or, better, to receive suggestions and comments, as together we try to fashion the best possible future for our FCC. I would also suggest that as you have some time to ruminate on what I've discussed today, I hope you will feel free to share those thoughts with me via e-mail or paper or through your Bureaus and Offices.

Thank you.