

**REMARKS OF ACTING CHAIRMAN MICHAEL J. COPPS  
EN BANC HEARING ON DIGITAL TELEVISION  
MARCH 5, 2009**

Good morning and welcome to this special en banc hearing on the Digital Television Transition, which also serves as our March FCC meeting. Thank you to our panelists, some of them returning for another bat up, and for everyone else attending. I'm also pleased to see the media here. While I think our trade press has done a laudable job covering the fast-changing events of the past month, and most local stations too, I must say I have found the national news media coverage more than a little wanting. Most Americans watching the national news maybe heard a small snippet about the transition deadline being extended to June 12 but they heard precious little about the fact that many stations would transition earlier. I don't know about you, but I ran into a lot of people who told me nothing would be happening transition-wise until June. That was, and is, a message bound to create unnecessary confusion.

It was quite a month. Since we last met, the final transition date was officially moved to June 12, and February 17 is now viewable only in the rear-view mirror. February 17 didn't turn out to be the giant switch-over originally planned—thank goodness, thank Congress and the President. Clearly, consumers were far from ready for the giant leap that would have been. So we took a smaller step. As you'll hear today, while about a third of stations transitioned nationwide, mostly in smaller TV markets, only about fifteen percent of consumers were significantly affected. So we have a long way to go.

Given the time of year, I'm tempted to use a March Madness metaphor here—we may have survived the first round game, but now we need to work even harder because the games are only going to get tougher. But if there's one thing I've learned about the DTV transition, it's that there are no analogies. There are no real precedents, nothing from which to draw parallels. This is why a phased transition is so helpful—we have additional opportunities to learn what works and what doesn't and to apply those lessons as we move towards June 12. Too bad we had to get to a phased transition so painfully and slowly, but I think the end result is going to be very helpful. We can learn some lessons and make some mid-course corrections. That's what we're here to talk about this morning.

For now, let me just set forth two of the key principles that I believe must guide us over the next few months. First, our efforts must put consumers first—particularly the most vulnerable among us. For many, television is not simply a source of entertainment, but a vital source of news and information that can literally be a lifeline in an emergency. Second, we must tell the American people the truth. They don't want their information sugar-coated, nor do they want it alarmist. They want it straight. They will forgive a lot, but they won't forgive being lulled into a false sense that the transition will be less disruptive or less expensive than it turns out to be. If some of them are going to need new antennas to receive digital signals, let's tell them so. If a station's coverage area has shifted and some consumers won't get a signal no matter what they do, let's tell them so.

If that digital signal can sometimes be less robust than may have been thought, let's say so. With apologies to Jack Nicholson, consumers can handle the truth.

We've made some real progress in the past month. I'm particularly proud of the outstanding work of our FCC team. You'll see and hear about some of that work today. You'll see a new web-based tool developed by FCC engineers that will help consumers understand what stations they should be able to receive at their home address and what kind of antenna they might need to receive them. I may be biased, but I think it's the best tool of its kind out there. You'll also hear some of the stories of the FCC outreach team, a group of truly dedicated public servants who have traveled far and wide to make a real difference in communities across the country. I also want to thank my two colleagues, Jonathan Adelstein and Rob McDowell, both for the outreach they do and also the leadership within that they are providing on consumer outreach, call centers and much, much more.

But we at the FCC are only a small piece of the puzzle. Industries, consumer groups, civil rights and civic organizations, local governments, and many more have stepped up to help the country transition, and they have made a tremendous contribution by doing so. I thank them—but I also tell them their work is only partly done and the greatest part of the test is still ahead of us. I will spare everyone here—just this once—my spiel on how public-private partnerships are so often central to overcoming national challenges like this. Suffice it to say that, working together, we can—we will—make a huge difference for consumers. Who knows—if we pull together as a team, we might even make the Final Four.