

**STATEMENT OF
ACTING CHAIRMAN MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: *A National Broadband Plan for Our Future*, GN Docket No. 09-51

Today we commence a national dialogue on how we as a nation can make high-speed broadband available, affordable and easily useable to citizens and businesses throughout the land. This is a good news item. In spite of the fact that it springs in part from an economic downturn that has put a lot of our fellow citizens on the ropes, it signals that at long last we are getting serious about making our citizens and our country more competitive, prosperous, and fulfilled. It means that we are coming to grips with the fact that we have a long way to go to get high-speed, value-laden broadband out to all our citizens. It means that we are beginning to understand that real economic and social progress needs to be fueled by both vigorous private enterprise *and* enlightened public policy. The missing ingredient until this year has been the enlightened public policy.

This Commission has never, I believe, received a more serious charge than the one to spearhead development of a national broadband plan. Congress has made it crystal clear that it expects the best thinking and recommendations we can put together by next February. If we do our job well, this will be the most formative—indeed transformative—proceeding ever in the Commission’s history.

Broadband can be the great enabler that restores America’s economic well-being and opens doors of opportunity for all Americans to pass through, no matter who they are, where they live, or the particular circumstances of their individual lives. It is technology that intersects with just about every great challenge confronting our nation—whether it’s jobs, education, energy, climate change and the environment, international competitiveness, health care, overcoming disabilities, equal opportunity—the list goes on. Enabling our people and our enterprises through value-laden broadband can spell the difference between just muddling through if we’re lucky and opening the way to many more years of U.S. prosperity and world leadership.

When I arrived here in 2001 and called for the Commission to engage in a serious dialogue about the future of broadband, it was unclear whether such a dialogue would occur. On many occasions over the intervening years, I talked about how the country lacked a national strategy; how we lacked even the essential data on which to build a viable strategy; and how we were paying way too high a price because of a cavalier approach to an urgent national problem. But that was then and today is now. We have new national leadership committed to broadband and we have economic dislocation that has awakened many people to the need for a decidedly new direction. But we’re not going to get to where we need to go without a road map, and it’s that road map that we begin designing today. We begin at last to do what we should have done years ago—make a plan for how the United States becomes the world’s broadband beacon.

Broadband products and applications, both fixed and mobile, have already fundamentally changed the way Americans go about their daily lives. Many of us—

primarily in relatively well-off urban areas—have become at least familiar with the promise of broadband to communicate with family and friends, to telework and bank, to interact with government, to get news and information, and many other applications. Yet all this progress is only a small part—just prologue—to what this technology is going to do to change our lives in the years ahead. Think about the impact high-speed connections can have on students of all ages and in all areas who could access distance learning, research, or job retraining. Or telemedicine networks that can manage medical records, save lives and improve the standard of well-being for Americans living in areas that lack access to the breadth of medical expertise, specialty care, and advanced medical technologies available in other areas. Think about a nationwide, interoperable public safety system to help first responders see us through hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards and man-made disasters. Think about smart grids for energy efficiency. New tools to gauge and even slow climate change. The list goes on. In fact, it would be a far shorter list if we enumerated those aspects of our national life that will *not* be impacted by high-speed, value-laden broadband.

So we launch today. Our Notice of Inquiry seeks to be open, inclusive, out-reaching and data-hungry. It seeks input from stakeholders both traditional and non-traditional—those who daily ply the halls of our hallowed Portals, those that would like to have more input here if we really enable them to have it, and those who may never have heard of the Federal Communications Commission. It will go outside Washington, DC to rural communities, the inner city and tribal lands. It will go where the facts and the best analysis we can find take it. It will look at broadband supply and broadband demand. It will look at broadband quality and affordable prices. It will endeavor to better understand, and hopefully build upon, the cross-cutting nature of what broadband encompasses, beginning with an appreciation that it brings opportunities to just about every sphere of our national life. And it can also consider, in addition to the many opportunity-generating characteristics of broadband, how to deal with any problems, threats or vulnerabilities that seem almost inevitably to accompany new technologies. Ensuring broadband openness, avoiding invasions of people’s privacy, and ensuring cybersecurity are three such challenges that come immediately to mind. We have never in history seen so dynamic and potentially-liberating a technology as this—but history tells us that no major technology transformation is ever a total, unmixed, problem-less blessing.

Going forward, we will distill the information that enters this NOI funnel with our eyes on the prize—a national broadband plan that is focused, practical and achievable. Instead of trying to resolve every contentious issue that has fueled so many years of seemingly-endless debates over telecommunications—debates that have too often deflected us from the progress we should have been making—we will go in quest of practical suggestions that can be deployed in time to respond to the economic and many other challenges facing us.

It’s a huge task that we undertake today. Every Bureau in this Commission will have a role to play in the development of the national broadband plan. I expect everyone here will put their best effort forward to realize the objective we seek. And I hope all

stakeholders—and that means whoever wishes to be heard in this critical public policy discussion—will respond to the NOI. Commenters need not—indeed cannot—respond to all the many inquiries we raise, nor should they feel compelled to. Single out those areas where you feel you can make a contribution and share your insights and suggestions with us. If there’s a question or a dimension of the problem that the NOI misses, we want to hear about that and have your ideas there, too. When I say we strive to be inclusive, I mean really inclusive.

The preparation of this NOI has been a cross-cutting effort involving just about every office in the Commission. I thank the Bureaus and Offices for the hard work they have already put in—and I also use the occasion to warn them we are only just beginning. I want to thank my two colleagues, Jonathan Adelstein and Robert McDowell, for their participation and leadership and the many helpful suggestions they have made to move this proceeding along. Their staffs have been great, too. My own office has worked hard on this, too, and I want to particularly commend Scott Deutchman for his efforts to bring people and ideas together for our broadband mobilization—and mobilization it is.

Let me also recognize a few special guests here at the Commission this morning: Dennis Amari from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and David Villano and Mary Campanola from the Rural Utilities Service. Their presence here bespeaks the beginnings of true inter-agency cooperation on the broadband challenge, an effort that is already reaching out to include many other agencies of government at the federal, state and local levels. We need the help of all of them. If no sector is outside the new world of advanced communications, then no agency should be, either.

You may have concluded by now that I think this is a pretty big deal. It really is. You don’t have to trust me about that—the President and the Congress think so, too. And, judging from my meetings around the country, I think millions of our fellow citizens get it, too. All these folks are looking for the best possible effort here. That’s what my colleagues and I are determined to give them. Of course, if we want the best possible product going out, we need the best possible data, analysis and recommendations coming in. That’s why I encourage maximum public input into this critical public policy dialogue.