

Remarks of
Chairman Julius Genachowski
to the Staff of the
Federal Communications Commission
June 30, 2009

Some said this day would never come.

Actually, that's not quite right. Everybody said this day would come ... in January ... then February ... then March ... then April.

Well, it may have taken a little longer to get here than expected, but I'm home again at the FCC, and I've got to tell you: it feels great.

As I look across the room at my fellow employees, and as I've had a chance to start walking around the building, I see many familiar faces. Much has changed since we were last together. Some of you have risen to senior management positions. Others have left the agency and have, like me, returned. Sadly, some have passed on.

But the FCC's potential as a force for good remains constant.

Let me start by thanking a few people. First, Commissioner Copps for his extraordinary service to the agency for the past 5 months, and for 8 years before that. Commissioner Copps' dedication to the public interest is truly an inspiration to us all. Our nation is fortunate to have had his decades of remarkable public service, and I look forward to working with him--and learning from him--in the months and years ahead. Please join me in giving him a round of applause.

I want to also thank Commissioner McDowell, my partner in the confirmation process. It was a pleasure to meet Commissioner McDowell over the last few weeks, and to talk about our shared interests and our shared belief in the importance of the FCC. I'm delighted that I will be swearing him in for a full term at the Commission meeting this Thursday, and I'm excited by the opportunity to serve with him in the days ahead. Thank you Commissioner McDowell.

I'd like to recognize Commissioner Adelstein for his service. While he is no longer a Commissioner, he remains a part of our family, and I am certain he will continue to be an indispensable ally to the agency and its mission in his new post at the Department of Agriculture, where he will head the Rural Utilities Service.

I'd like to thank President Obama for giving me this incredible opportunity to serve at this time of dramatic change and possibility... and for nominating me on Alexander Graham Bell's birthday.

One of my most enduring memories from my prior time here at the Commission was learning, in 1995 in an FCC University class taught by Dale Hatfield, what it was that Alexander Graham Bell actually invented. I remember driving home that night thinking, first... that was cool; and second, about how profoundly Bell's insight—a technique for capturing sound and sending it over electrical wires—changed our lives and changed the world.

It was a first step down a road leading to places even a visionary like Bell could scarcely have imagined: where his telephone would become mobile -- and now smart – brimming with thousands of apps that have unleashed new waves of creativity and innovation; where we would have the Internet, not to mention social networking, which is redefining the meaning of community; where gigabit fiber connections would allow the transmission of massive amounts of data, literally at light speed.

This is a road the FCC has traveled now for 75 years. It is a great and humbling honor to return to the agency to continue our travels on this path at this extraordinary moment when the promise of technology has never been brighter and our obligations at the FCC have never been greater.

That brings me to the most important people I want to thank today: YOU, the women and men who make this agency tick. You are this agency's greatest asset, and you are the main reason I am so optimistic about what we can achieve together.

The depth and the breadth of knowledge about communications networks and devices – in this room, this building, and in FCC offices across the country – are vast. You are not only America's experts on these critically important matters, you are the world's. I look forward to listening to and learning from you, and to working together to find ways to ensure that communications improves the lives of all Americans.

I've had the chance to speak with some of you already, and I'm excited to speak with as many of you as I can, including people in each bureau and office.

While today is only my first full day back, I have already been the beneficiary of your expertise.

As many of you know, my confirmation hearing was on June 16th. When the hearing was scheduled, my first thought was relief that a date had finally been set. My second was, "Hey, that's only four days after the DTV transition."

I could have faced tough questions about the agency's handling of this enormous change in broadcasting. But that didn't happen – and that is because you did a great job with a difficult hand.

As you all know, our work on the DTV transition is not over yet.

But the June 12th switch succeeded far beyond expectations. You pulled it off by working collaboratively with each other across the agency, and with the Commerce Department and other parts of government, and by thinking creatively to leverage all available resources.

One reality of working in government is that when it works best, people notice it the least. Let me just say that I noticed what you have accomplished thus far with the DTV transition, and so did countless others, including the hundreds of thousands of Americans you touched directly.

Through the ongoing DTV transition, you are proving that the FCC can make a positive difference in the lives of Americans. I'd like to talk today about how we can build on this.

With each passing day, communications devices and networks become more essential to the fabric of the daily lives of all Americans. They are how we receive news, information, and entertainment; how we stay in touch with our friends and family—simply to talk, or in times of emergency; how we work at and run our businesses, large and small; how we—and people across the globe—learn about government, and express points of view.

Put simply, our communications infrastructure is the foundation upon which our economy and our society rest. And it has never been more important that we unleash its potential.

Our nation is at a crossroads. We face a number of tremendous challenges: our economy, education, health care, and energy, to name a few. If we do our jobs right and harness the power of communications to confront these challenges, we will have chosen the right course, and we will make a real positive difference in the lives of our children and future generations. Just imagine:

A small business in Gettysburg will be able to connect and compete with businesses in Pittsburgh, or even Johannesburg.

An elderly person in Georgia will be able get remote medical monitoring from a specialist at Georgetown, better health care at lower cost.

A struggling eighth grader in Columbia, South Carolina will be able to get tutoring from a student at Columbia University.

And parents in Baltimore will be able to connect with live video to their son or daughter serving in Baghdad or Afghanistan.

As the country's expert agency on communications, it is our job to pursue this vision of a more connected America, focusing on the following goals:

- Promoting universal broadband that's robust, affordable and open.

- Pursuing policies that promote job creation, competition, innovation and investment.
- Protecting and empowering consumers and families.
- Helping deliver public safety communications networks with the best technology to serve our firefighters, police officers, and other first responders.
- Advancing a vibrant media landscape, in these challenging times, that serves the public interest in the 21st century.
- Seizing the opportunity for the United States to lead the world in mobile communications.

These are just some of the goals we will pursue in the days ahead.

How we will work will be central to what we can achieve.

We will be fair.

We will be open and transparent.

Our policy decisions will be fact-based and data-driven.

We will strive to be smart about technology; smart about economics and businesses; smart about law and history; and smart every day about how our actions affect the lives of consumers.

We will use technology and new media to enhance the everyday worklives of FCC staff, green the agency, and improve overall operations of the FCC – running efficiently, communicating effectively, and opening the agency to participation from everyone affected by the FCC’s actions. And, stay tuned, we will have a new FCC website.

None of this will happen overnight. I’ve been around this enough to know – and you’ve been around this enough to know – that you can’t just snap your fingers and make it happen. It will take hard, often unglamorous, work by all of us. But with all of the talent in this agency, I know that, when we pull in the same direction and when we focus on our mission and what the American people expect of us, we can achieve great things. In the end, I want people to look at the FCC – our FCC -- and say “this is an agency that works.”

So far, I’ve talked about what we are going to do, and how we are going to do it. I’d like to close by talking about why. Why do we serve in government and why do we serve at the FCC?

We serve because we believe our nation can always do better and that it must do better. We serve because, in our America, we are defined not by what we earn, but by what we give.

We all have our own stories, our own personal reasons for choosing public service. For me, it starts with my parents, immigrants, from whom I learned the meaning of the American Dream. And from whom I learned another powerful lesson.

Some of you may have heard me tell the story about the time I was in high school and my dad took me into the dusty stacks of the MIT library, and showed me engineering plans he had drafted as a graduate student. They were for a device designed to someday help blind people “read” words on paper by translating text into physical signals.

The formulas and drawings didn’t make much sense to me, but the core lesson has remained with me: communications technology has the power to transform lives for the better.

That’s never been more true than today. Communications must play a role in solving many of our nation’s most pressing challenges. It’s the FCC’s job – our job – to turn this aspiration into reality. We will be judged by whether we find concrete, practical ways to improve the lives of all of our nation’s people.

Why do we serve at the FCC?

We do it for this moment. We do it for this opportunity. Will we capture it? Looking at the faces in this audience, I already know the answer.

Let’s get to work.

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