

**BENCH REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS  
ON PRESENTATION OF NATIONAL BROADBAND PLAN PROCESS  
FCC OPEN MEETING, WASHINGTON, DC  
JULY 2, 2009**

Our charge from Congress and the President to develop a national broadband plan is, as I have said before, the biggest and most exciting challenge to come the Commission's way—certainly since the implementation of the 1996 Act, probably ever. Mr. Chairman, as I'm sure you know, I have been shouting from the roof-tops about this for most of my eight years on the Commission, calling for a national strategy to bring broadband out to every American—no matter who they are, where they live, or the particular circumstances of their individual lives. Now, thanks to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, we have a commitment for such a plan. And—good news for us—it is the FCC that is directed to develop the plan. What an opportunity we have, and I am so pleased, Mr. Chairman, that you are already leading the charge with vision and deep personal commitment to make the plan a reality.

Blair, you and I have known each other for a long time, and it's my view, and I know it's a view shared in telecom quarters throughout the country, that you have the talent, ability and experience to coordinate this massive undertaking for the Commission. I knew this when you joined us just four weeks ago and it's clear from your presentation today that your work is well underway. I am thoroughly impressed by the quality and quantity of work you have done in less than a month. In fact, your work is so good that my expectations just keep rising every day! We're expecting big things! There is a level of excitement I feel as you and I talk to people at the FCC about the Chairman's vision, the Administration's commitment to broadband, and the Commission's opportunity to lead the way on the greatest infrastructure challenge of our time.

I want to underline a couple of things of importance to me that you raised in your presentation. I think it may have been at one of our very first meetings where you and I discussed the fact that what the FCC produces in February must be a plan, and not a report. A report is a moment in time event that assesses and analyzes a situation and may make a few recommendations. What the FCC has been charged to do is altogether different—it is to complete a forward-looking, strategic, data-driven, accessible, living, breathing plan that can guide us to affordable, value-laden broadband in every corner of our country and restore our preeminence as the world's technology leader. I was so pleased that we were of one mind in sharing the more expansive vision. But what a challenge to do that! We must take the huge ocean of data elicited by our April Notice of Inquiry, and so much more data and analysis still to be garnered, pour it into our big broadband funnel, and make sure that what comes out the other end of that funnel is a focused, practical, do-able plan to get this huge job done. Making it come out right means an effort unlike any we've done before. Yet I know—better than ever as a result of my last five months—that our FCC team is up to the challenge—actually, I think we were just made for it!

The other point I'd make is that for this to happen the way it should happen requires a level of public outreach, public input and public dialogue that we have never

before achieved. I am encouraged that the development of this plan already promises to engage the public in many ways we haven't done before—certainly not before the DTV transition. Workshops, public meetings, town hall gatherings can all be a part of this. So, importantly, can the Internet. We have done some of this some of the time in the past; now we must do much more—all the time. The new and evolving website is a great start. But I think we agree that we need to be really imaginative here. The goal is maximum civic engagement—and I like that term “civic engagement.” We need to implement, over time, civic engagement across the whole wide gamut of issues where the Commission has jurisdiction—and broadband is the right place for us to begin. New technologies, techniques and non-traditional outreach can put the focus of this Commission on what it is supposed to be—a consumer-oriented and consumer-responsive agency. We need people talking to us and us talking to people, but we also need to find ways to engage a great national discussion—people talking to people—so that, as a nation, we can all buy into an aggressive broadband plan based on the shared understanding of how critical broadband is to our individual and national futures. This kind of citizen buy-in is vital, both to the development of a good plan and, certainly, to its implementation.

No one should think that we're putting all this emphasis on broadband for the sake of broadband. Broadband is about something else. It is the great enabler. That's what infrastructure is always about. Without infrastructure, nothing moves— shipments of agriculture, wheels of commerce, or the information society of the Twenty-first century. There are no solutions to the colossal challenges we face as a nation and seek to overcome—energy dependence, environmental degradation, educational shortfalls, job losses, inadequate health care delivery for so many, even our damaged civic dialogue—there is no solution to *any* of these that does not contain a critical broadband component within it. Enable broadband and you enable America.

Getting our broadband plan rolling was, right alongside DTV, top priority for me over the past five months. Those were months we could not afford to waste in a country that wasted too many years by ignoring broadband planning. But, as Blair has shown, we've got a good process going and, with a full-court Commission press between now and February, we can—we will—get the job done.

So mark me down, if you haven't already, as totally energized by this proceeding. I am very pleased with the process you have laid out here today, Blair. I know the Chairman has great plans for this and I am looking forward to working with him, my colleagues, you, our terrific and talented FCC team, and with the American people to develop a national broadband plan that we can all be proud of.