

STATEMENT OF  
COMMISSIONER MEREDITH A. BAKER

Re: *Consumer Information and Disclosure*, CG Docket No. 09-158; *Truth-in-Billing and Billing Format*, CC Docket No. 98-170; *IP-Enabled Services*, WC Docket No. 04-36.

Promoting consumer interests is one of the most important priorities that Congress has given us as a Commission. I take this responsibility very seriously and I am pleased to support this item. I particularly want to congratulate the staff of the Bureau for their fine work on this *Notice*.

With this *Notice*, we launch a broad inquiry to gather evidence to determine whether consumers of communications services have the information they need, and whether providers disclose the information they should in today's marketplace. Although the Commission has addressed truth-in-billing issues in the past, the proceeding we launch today will, rightfully, take a fresh look at consumer information and disclosure issues in a comprehensive approach. Information empowers consumers to make informed choices about products and services at all stages of their consumer experience, from choosing a provider to deciding whether and when to switch to a new provider or service plan.

I am particularly encouraged that the item recognizes industry's voluntary efforts to address consumer demands for more and better information about products and services. I am also pleased that it includes questions about whether our existing rules continue to make sense in the current marketplace. I hope for broad and substantive participation in this proceeding, so that we will have a solid record on which to build a complete and accurate understanding of the market.

It is important that we avoid regulating where the marketplace is actively responding to consumers' concerns. All regulation—no matter how well intentioned—imposes costs. Especially at a time when our nation faces significant economic challenges, we have a responsibility to weigh the benefits of any proposed regulation against the costs, as well as to carefully consider potential unintended consequences of our actions. This is especially important when considering consumer protection regulations. At our confirmation hearing, Senator Johanns said that when we impose regulations “somebody pays for that, and you know, it's not the big corporation. It really is the consumer. And if you don't strike that right balance, you hammer the little guy.” I agree.

As regulators, if we don't strike the right balance, we risk imposing costs and other regulatory burdens on providers that can in turn raise prices, reduce quality of service, and harm innovation. These results—although unintended—may harm consumer welfare as much as the consumer-unfriendly practices our decisions are intended to prevent. Government should proceed with caution so as to ensure the best outcome for consumers.

Having said that, I recognize that this *Notice* only initiates an inquiry that will not lead directly to new regulatory obligations. Although I will be particularly mindful of the balance of benefits and costs as we move forward with the Commission's agenda, I fully support this effort to gather fact-based evidence on which we can evaluate the current state of the marketplace. I see this inquiry as fundamental to our role as the expert agency and in our responsibility to promote consumer welfare. Consumers are counting on us.

So with those thoughts in mind, I look forward to working in a renewed spirit of cooperation with Congress, the Chairman, my fellow commissioners, Commission staff, consumers, and industry in the days and months ahead.