

**TESTIMONY OF FCC COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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Good morning Chairman Boucher, Ranking Member Stearns, and Members of the Subcommittee. Let me first express my deep gratitude to you for your support and guidance, particularly during the five months that I was privileged to serve as the Commission’s Acting Chairman earlier this year. It was an incredibly busy and eventful time, dealing with some very urgent problems—foremost the DTV Transition—and launching an historic proceeding growing out of the mandate of Congress for the Commission to develop a National Broadband Plan.

I am pleased that we were able to navigate through this period, helping to lay the groundwork for what could be among the most extraordinary actions ever in the FCC’s seventy-five year history. I am optimistic. New Chairman Genachowski brings great experience, intellect and commitment to his job. I tremendously value my relationship with my good friend and colleague, Commissioner Rob McDowell, who made a world of difference in the success of our DTV program during those months while I was Acting Chairman. Fellow Commissioners Mignon Clyburn and Meredith Baker are now on-board with obvious experience and talents, so I believe we are poised for progress. I also want to thank my friend and former colleague Jonathan Adelstein for his tremendous service as Commissioner over nearly seven years. I miss him sitting by me here this morning, but I know he will serve the public interest well as the new Administrator of the Rural Utilities Service of the Department of Agriculture.

The Commission is focused now on its most visible activity for this year and next—broadband. It is hard to overstate the importance of this proceeding. Broadband is—or should

be—our country’s great enabler. It is part of the answer to just about *every* great challenge we confront as a nation—lost jobs, shortfalls in education, energy dependence, environmental degradation, inadequate health care delivery, and the list goes on. It is the Twenty-first century’s great infrastructure challenge, comparable to the challenges earlier generations confronted to build enabling infrastructures like turnpikes, roads, bridges, canals, highways, regional and then transcontinental railroads, rural electricity and even basic telephone service. Now it’s broadband’s turn to help restore economic well-being and open the doors of opportunity for all Americans—no matter who they are, where they live, or the particular circumstances of their individual lives. Enable broadband and we enable the citizens of this great country.

This Committee, Congress and the President have charged the FCC to develop a national broadband plan—something I have been advocating for the eight years I have been at the Commission. I am pleased that the Commission launched a comprehensive broadband Notice of Inquiry this past April. I am greatly encouraged by Chairman Genachowski’s commitment to an open, transparent, and data-driven broadband process—that is precisely what we need. And, under Chairman Genachowski’s lead, this Commission continues in that direction with the broadband.gov website, the many workshops, and the open docket. Indeed, I hope that our broadband proceeding will serve as a model for future FCC proceedings in the way that we achieve maximum civic engagement with traditional and non-traditional stakeholders alike. The broadband plan should be of, by, and for the American people.

I have great confidence in our FCC team to get this job done. I’ve long admired the skill and professionalism of our staff, but my experience as Acting Chair only heightened my appreciation of their talents. Take the DTV transition, which was, I believe, the finest team effort I’ve been part of in my 30-plus years of public service. Thankfully, Congress and the

President gave us the additional time and resources we needed to make a difference. And— together with our partners in the public and private sectors—I think we did. If anyone wants to know what true public service looks like, they need look no further than the hundreds of Commission staffers here in Washington and around the country who devoted themselves to making the transition work for the American people. And if anyone wants to know what a difference public-private sector partnering can make, just look at the cooperation among broadcasters, cable, satellite, equipment manufacturers and distributors, civil right organizations, consumer and advocacy organizations, labor, religious groups, civic and volunteer organizations, AmeriCorps, the fire chiefs and so many agencies of federal, state and local governments who came together to meet an urgent need.

Our DTV work continues—because the transition is not over yet. While the great majority of full-power stations—and their viewers—made it through June 12 without serious lingering problems, as with any transition of this magnitude we still have some issues to work through. Technology changes are hardly ever painless and when they don't get the attention they deserve until the last minute—as too often happened here—some level of disruption is guaranteed. I traveled the country for many months warning there would be disruptions, and there were. But our team—working with affected consumers and the stations serving them—is staying with it until these problems are resolved. I should also note that we still have hundreds of low-power television and translator stations waiting for their DTV transition in the years ahead. We will need to mobilize again, although admittedly on a lesser scale. That's one reason why it is important to learn the lessons of the experience we have just come through. As Acting Chairman, I told our folks we needed to develop a comprehensive “lessons learned” report that will capture what we went through—what went right, what could have gone better, and what we

learned about how to make future transitions and changes as painless as possible for consumers. There is so much to be mined from the DTV experience: setting up and publicizing a national call center; consumer outreach; the close coordination with the Commerce Department and other government agencies from federal to hyper-local; the unique partnerships with groups like AmeriCorps; and the way we turned a cozy little agency on the banks of the Potomac into something of a grass-roots organization in every market in the country. And I am pleased that Chairman Genachowski is committed to just such a report.

We have much to do going forward in addition to DTV and broadband. We need to focus on our media environment. Just about every member of this Committee knows this has been a passion of mine over the years. We rely on our broadcast media for so much of the news we must have, for emergency and public safety information, for public affairs programming essential to our civic dialogue, and for programming that supports the health and welfare of our children and reflects the social and cultural diversity that comprises the great tapestry that is America. We have not been sufficiently attentive to this.

We neglected it, for example, in the DTV transition I have just discussed. There we focused a lot—rightly so—on the technical aspects of the transition, from the build-out of digital broadcasting facilities to getting DTV converter boxes into consumers' homes. But we fell short in one hugely important way, because the potential public interest benefits got a little bit lost in the shuffle. We've put the American people through a lot, and we've devoted a lot of public resources (including spectrum) to bring our TV broadcasting system into the Digital Age, but no one knows, or even has a plan, for how this new spectrum will fulfill its huge potential. Stations can now broadcast four, five or even more program streams using the same amount of spectrum they used to transmit just one stream in analog. What an opportunity for broadcasters—whose

strength is local—to develop programs reflecting local issues, culture, sports and all the rest. But too few of them are taking advantage of their new capacity.

We all know, of course, that broadcast media have encountered significant challenges as a result of the economic downturn, like so many other segments of the economy. But this, too, will pass, and it might pass even faster for them if the right kind of business plans can be joined with the right kind of policy environment to encourage broadcasters to take full advantage of the strengths they have.

Finally, our country is awakening to the realization that there is a crisis in journalism, including certainly broadcast journalism. News gathering and news dissemination expenses are being cut to the bone; investigative journalism is too often falling by the way-side; and these constraints are endangering, I believe, the vibrancy of the civic dialogue on which our democracy depends. Recently, the legendary Walter Cronkite died. One of my good fortunes in serving at the FCC was to get to know this good and wise man, and we had numerous discussions about the deepening crisis in journalism and the urgent need to tackle this problem. We shared a platform at a Columbia University forum on the future of the media one time, and I will always remember his concluding remark. This is what he said: “America is the most prosperous and powerful nation in perhaps the history of the world. We can certainly afford to sustain a media system of which we can be proud.” I look forward to working with this Committee on this issue, too.

There is much more for us to do going forward and to talk about today and I look forward to your comments, your counsel and your questions. Thank you again for your oversight and for your continuing support.