

**REMARKS OF FCC COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS  
JOINT CENTER FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STUDIES  
U.S. CAPITOL VISITOR CENTER  
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Thank you so much, Chairman Genachowski, for your very kind and generous remarks—both their substance and also the nice things you said about me. Your warm sentiments are reciprocated. I think it’s apparent to everyone in this room that a new day has dawned at the Federal Communications Commission and that your leadership is already paying huge dividends—we have only to witness your historic announcement yesterday on Internet Freedom to appreciate that. The FCC is driving down the road now with bright new headlights lighting the way instead of navigating through the rear-view mirror. We have committed to bold new strategies for getting high-value broadband out to all our citizens. And we are bringing new openness and transparency, not just to the substance of what we do, but to the process of how we do it. Central to that open and transparent process is making sure that all of our citizens—not just a privileged few—have a voice in the deliberations of the Commission. I believe this FCC is poised to do historic things. And when we are fortunate enough to be in a period that is, at long last, hospitable to change and reform, we have the most solemn obligation to respond to the call of the trumpet, to answer the summons of history and get the job done the way it should be done.

I am pleased to be here with you this afternoon in this wonderful new addition to our nation’s Capitol. I want first to extend my appreciation to my friend of more than 30 years, Ralph Everett, President and CEO of the Joint Center. I thank him for inviting me to be here, and I thank him for the visionary yet practical leadership he has brought to the Joint Center. I am so happy that under Ralph’s guidance, the Joint Center has given such high priority to the challenges of media, technology and broadband. The unveiling last November of the Center’s Media and Technology Institute was music to my ears. Having Ralph and the Joint Center involved in these issues is tremendously helpful, not just in the world of ideas, but also in the world of policy-making here on Capitol Hill, all through this town, and around the country. The Joint Center is making a difference. I congratulate the Joint Center on the release today of its new “Broadband Imperatives Report.” As Chairman Genachowski has stated, it is vitally important that good data drive the process of developing a national broadband plan, so we welcome this expert report from the Joint Center. It is an important addition to the dialogue we are fostering at the Commission. I also want to thank Ralph and others from his Joint Center team for participating in the broadband workshops the Commission has been holding over the past six weeks.

I of course welcome the participation of all the other organizations represented here today. This is a distinguished and powerful assemblage. And your help is needed—from the grassroots that you organize right on to the top of this Hill where we gather today. All the good things Chairman Genachowski is talking about, all the needs that have gone unmet for so many years, all the new policy breakthroughs we are beginning to see—all of these depend upon each and every one of us working together—working

together like never before—to take advantage of the opportunity we now have to make a difference.

Finally, a special thanks to the FCC's Diversity Committee, many of whose members are here, including its chairman and my good friend, Henry Rivera. The Committee—and its membership list is so impressive—met this morning over at the Commission. I am happy to say that they are responding wonderfully well to the call for action that I gave them right after I became Acting Chairman of the Commission earlier this year. As soon as we got the Committee reconstituted, I charged it to give the Commission recommendations on such initiatives as full file review—an interim method that could enable the Commission to develop more targeted ownership policies. And this morning the Committee voted to recommend this approach to the Commission. I also had asked the committee to evaluate our past efforts at developing *Adarand* studies, a further step needed before we can use more race-conscious policies to address the current disparities in broadcast ownership. Those studies are needed, as most of you know, to satisfy the courts that we have the data to back up our rules. Here, too, the Committee acted this morning. You can see why I'm excited! I wholeheartedly welcome these recommendations and I will be working for their prompt consideration—and I underscore that word “prompt”—by the full Commission. Minorities and women have been left on the wrong side of the gate in communications—as in so many other areas—and in some ways have been even less served in communications than in other sectors of the economy. We've got a long journey ahead of us, but I do believe we're going to be able to begin turning things around in the months just ahead.

I also want to acknowledge this morning's announcement on the formation of the Broadband Opportunity Coalition, a consortium of civil rights groups committed to doing important work on broadband adoption in underserved communities. So we had a really exciting morning at the Commission. And all assembled seemed to be of one accord—the time is now to get things done.

I take special pride in our recent initiative to reform the way we gather comprehensive information on the ownership of radio and television broadcast stations. We've needed better data for quite a while now, and I am encouraged that our new Form 323 and the new entities that we are requiring to file this data will show us what the exact levels of ownership are and help us to pinpoint the problem areas. But even the statistics available to us now tell a woeful tale of missed opportunity and neglect. In a country that is more than one-third minority, people of color own just over 3% of full power commercial TV stations. Three percent! Is it any wonder that minorities are so often stereotyped and caricatured on the programs we see and hear and that the positive contributions of minority communities around the country are so often overlooked? The state of female ownership is likewise dismal. Women are 51% of our population, yet they own 5.8% of those TV stations. Women, too, are deserving of more accurate, less stereotyped depictions. So, I am pleased that we have new recommendations from the Diversity Committee, and you can count on me to put my shoulder to the wheel, alongside the Chairman and my Commission colleagues, to begin turning things around.

Speaking of creating opportunity—Congress’ charge to the FCC to develop a national broadband plan is something we will look back on years from now and realize what a truly once-in-a-lifetime opportunity it was. To me, getting high-speed, high-value broadband out to all our citizens is the central infrastructure challenge of this first half of the Twenty-first century. You know, if you course back through the annals of this nation’s history—by the way, I used to teach this stuff in college—you will find that just about every major era had its own major infrastructure challenge. In the very early days, as settlers streamed out beyond the Eastern Seaboard, the challenge was to get the produce and products they made to markets back East. We needed roads and turnpikes and bridges and canals; we needed ports and harbor improvements. And we found ways, enterprise and government working together, to get the job done. Then, as we became a vast continental and industrial power, the need was to lay a railway grid across the country, climaxed by the great saga of the Transcontinental railroads. We did that, too. Later we found ways to get electricity out across the land. Closer to our own era, beginning in the 1950s, came the Interstate Highway System. Even in telecom, we found ways to bring basic telephone service to most of our citizens. Here is my point: in all of these great infrastructure build-outs, there has always been a critical role for the private sector and government to work together. Yes, the private sector in this country leads the way, but history tells us that works best when enlightened *public* policy sets the stage. Where we’ve been the last eight years—operating on the misguided and totally ahistorical premise that business alone can get the broadband job done, even in those areas where no business plan attracts business—ignores the way we built this country’s infrastructure over the years.

Developing a national broadband plan is and will continue to be an inclusive process at the FCC. We seek private sector and public sector input. We ask the tough questions that must be answered if we are to succeed. We search out a myriad of traditional and non-traditional stakeholders that deserve to be heard, with special emphasis on folks who don’t have that corporate lobbyist working for them in Washington—and that’s something we haven’t historically done very well. A broadband policy *for* the American people should be, to the maximum extent possible, a broadband policy *of* and *by* the American people. So this process—and I think you all can already see this—is not going to be another one of those “inside jobs.” It is going to be open, public and transparent, and backed by sufficient resources at the Commission for wide citizen participation and outreach. A series of field hearings is planned to engage the public on what their needs are and what a national broadband plan should include. One of the great take-away lessons of the recent Digital Transition is that we need to get out of our inside-the-Beltway cocoon. We did that with DTV and it helped a bunch. With broadband, just like with DTV, we need to spread the word, inform citizens about the benefits of going online and show them how it can improve their lives. I know that Commissioner Clyburn talked to you eloquently about broadband demand and adoption policies yesterday, so I won’t get much into that here, except to note the great importance of what she said.

I know we have many locally-elected officials here with us today. If I may speak frankly, you have a special responsibility and opportunity in this adoption challenge.

You and your offices are often the first point of contact for local citizens. You have their ear. What will you tell them about broadband? What will you do that will help to make broadband real and meaningful in the lives of the elder community? The disability communities? The young? What about low income? Or foreign-born and ethnic communities? How will you bring broadband to life for the people that need to engage in this debate the most? As I said at the beginning, it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. You and I know there's no guarantee it will come this way again.

So how do we optimize this unique window of opportunity for change that we have open before us? Will we squabble about who has more pressing needs—those in rural areas or those in urban areas? Will we wait for the federal government to make all the decisions and then express our concerns? Will we insist on picking and choosing which broadband technologies are favored in this process? Will we see a broadband plan as a zero sum game? I hope not. What I hope is that we'll put aside the debates that waste our time and squander our resources and divide the country when we should be coming together for the common good.

On the technology front, I hope you'll understand that at the end of the day, it won't necessarily be a one-size-fits-all plan. Different market segments will likely demand different solutions. What I do know is that we must succeed in bringing high-speed, high-value broadband and an open Internet to all Americans. That means rural *as well as* urban folks. It means low-income *as well as* affluent; seniors *as well as* kids in school; those with disabilities; *and* those who live on tribal lands. If high-speed broadband is permitted to become predominantly an affluent, urban phenomenon, the digital gap in this country that already separates urban and rural America—that separates franchised from the disenfranchised—can only grow wider. We just can't let that happen. This is serious business—the competitive world in which we and our children live is not going to make time for any part of America to catch up. Nor will it wait for America as a country to catch up. That may be harsh—but it's also true.

You know, whenever I give a talk like this, I imagine there are folks in the audience who are thinking, “Boy, this guy really gets carried away with these broadband and media issues. Doesn't he know about all the other problems we have in this country? Doesn't he know about jobs? And equal opportunity? And wars going on? And energy dependence? And climate degradation? And educational shortfalls? And millions of people without health care?”

But, you know, this isn't about broadband for the sake of broadband. If we succeed at our task of deploying this infrastructure across America, we will create millions of new jobs and businesses. We will bring more and better education to our children. We will advance medical care through the development and delivery of new health services. We will be able to tackle our debilitating energy dependence through smart grids and other smart energy initiatives. We will be able to slow the degradation of our environment. And enhance the delivery of government services. The list goes on, but my point is this: there are few if any challenges confronting our country today whose

solution does not have a broadband component involved in it. Broadband to me is the Great Enabler, empowering us to tackle our problems and to overcome.

Nor do I worry about the future of our media just for the sake of media. Let me take just another minute here because I'm concerned—and I mean *really* concerned—about the state of our media. The success of our media is so integral to the success of our country. If we have a media that reflects the genius and the diversity of America, that provides real news and information to citizens voting on the country's direction, that covers the communities where we actually live in all their splendid diversity, we will have a media that does justice to America. Lots of broadcasters do good things—no question about that—but at the end of the day our media environment is not measuring up to the challenges we face. Take the state of our news and, since I'm from the FCC, let's begin with broadcast news. We rely so heavily 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 reflecting the great cultural and ethnic diversity that comprises the great tapestry that is America. But news-gathering has been cut to the bone and in-depth investigative journalism will be an endangered species if we continue much longer down the road we're traveling. Broadband and the Internet open new opportunities, to be sure, but what we've gained there hasn't yet begun to match what we have already lost because of bad choices that have been made regarding traditional media. I'm talking about bad choices by the private sector through the heedless consolidation bazaar of the past decade that saddled companies with debt that became unmanageable when the economy went south and that sacrificed localism and diversity to uniformity and program homogenization. And I'm talking about bad choices by government, particularly the Commission of which I am a member, through mindless deregulation of public interest protections that undergirded the country's media landscape for decades. Together, I believe, these private and public choices exacted a heavy toll on consumers, on all our citizens and, in the end, even on the companies themselves.

We've been asleep at the public interest switch. We'd better wake up before it's too late. We should be developing policies, for example, to use some of that new digital television multi-cast capacity for programs that focus on local culture and diversity groups, on local civic affairs and elections, on local music and arts and sports. Wouldn't that be a wonderful counterweight to all the nationalized, homogenized, stereotyped mono-programming that seems to be evermore the norm? With a few media dance-masters calling the tune, too few of the kind of stories I am advocating make it to our screens. Too little real hard-hitting journalism. Too little news about what's really going on in America. I think we're playing with fire letting this happen. I think we're taking huge risks with our democracy. And I think we need to change it now. For openers, maybe, just maybe, when your FCC looks at a station's license renewal, instead of stamping the post card that comes in, we should be asking how that station is serving the interests of its locality? And the answer should determine our action.

Well, I think Ralph's getting nervous that I'm talking too long. But I just can't help myself in front of an audience like this. You folks can do so much. You can make

such a difference. None of this is easy, I know, but when have any of you had an easy road? The good news is the country has started down the right road under new leadership in government and we've got an opportunity to get some really good things done now. We've got that window of change opened. But you know as well as I—you know better than I—that just because windows are opened doesn't mean they're going to stay open. So we've got to act while we can act. Powerful interests on the other side may think they can outlast us. I don't believe it. Don't you believe it either. If we put these issues at the top where they belong, if we work together, plan smart, and really mobilize our families and friends and colleagues and brothers and sisters across the land, nothing can stop us. And when we succeed—and succeed we will—we will have done a lot to redeem the Promise of America. I think the fight's worth it, don't you?

Thank you very much.