

**REMARKS OF FCC COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
EVERETT C. PARKER ETHICS IN TELECOMMUNICATIONS LECTURE
RIVERSIDE CHURCH
NEW YORK, NEW YORK
SEPTEMBER 30, 2009**

Thank you so much Reverend Guffey for your gracious remarks. And thanks and congratulations to you and Reverend Guess for the great work the United Church of Christ is doing on a whole range of issues of great importance to the American public, from health care to energy to Middle East peace. UCC has a brilliant and storied history of progressive action in support of so many important causes, and one especially close to my heart—media reform and justice. And I am so pleased and encouraged that it is continuing its commitment to shepherding the interfaith community into the media and technology issues that impact their congregants and the larger society. So thank you both for your stewardship of this important organization. I also want to thank my friend Cheryl Leanza for her helping arrange my being at this gathering, as well as at the important luncheon meeting earlier today of the interfaith coalition, So We Might See. I'll speak a bit more about their grassroots efforts in a minute.

Allow me also to extend my congratulations to today's esteemed award recipients: Patti Miller of Sesame Workshop who seems to find new ways to serve the public interest every day—she's just great; Sam Simon, Chairman of Amplify Public Affairs; who I've known and admired for many years and whose work I join you in applauding; and Ben Popken and Meghann Marco, Co-Executive Editors of *The Consumerist*, who have done so much to benefit millions of American consumers—and just plain citizens, too. The efforts of all these outstanding awardees are truly inspirational. Congratulations again to each of you.

In paying homage to these wonderful awardees, of course, we pay homage again to the giant who made these awards, this event, and so much else, possible—the legend who marches with us and whose example leads us all—Dr. Everett C. Parker. When I say what an inspiration he continues to be to me, I'm only reflecting what so many of you in this audience feel, too. We all stand on his shoulders, we learn by his example, and we forge ahead inspired by his courage.

I believe that many of the causes for which Everett Parker worked, and works, so mightily are closer to achievement right now than they have ever been. A window of change and reform has opened for our country—not a moment too soon. And now, after years of dangerous drift and worse, America is poised at last to move ahead. So we will best honor Everett Parker by vowing today to bring these causes home while that window is still open. It's not going to happen by itself, but with the work ethic and the smarts and the faith that Dr. Parker still shows us, it can—and it *will*—happen.

I also am here today with a tip of my hat to “Betty Broadband. I recently made Betty's acquaintance on the Net, brought to us through the good work of So We Might See. I like Betty, and I hope—if you haven't had the chance to meet her—you will do so. She's

at the center of a clever campaign that uses Twenty-first century communications tools to organize public participation in media reform issues. Betty has a Facebook page; Betty has a letter writing contest – the winner gets an iPod! Betty has a “vimeo.” I’m not sure yet if Betty tweets, but she does get her point across. As her “vimeo” so aptly demonstrates, Betty doesn’t have high-speed Internet access. And she deserves to. Every American deserves to. So thanks, Betty, for helping get the broadband word out.

I’ve been working on that for eight years, so I really welcome Betty’s help. And let me tell you how much I welcome the leadership of the new Administration, and of Congress through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, to make broadband deployment and adoption a reality for every single citizen across this land. Not only does the Recovery and Reinvestment Act commit to ubiquitous broadband, but it puts the Federal Communications Commission, where I work, at the epicenter of developing a national broadband plan for America by the middle of next February. That’s a really tall order, but it’s also perhaps the most urgent and important mission the Commission has ever been charged to perform. Under the leadership of our new FCC chairman, Julius Genachowski, we are hard at work on the job.

Our charge 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. Broadband is the central infrastructure challenge of our time. Earlier generations of Americans, going all the way back to the beginning, met and mastered their own urgent infrastructure challenges. They built turnpikes, roads, bridges, regional railroads, transcontinental railroads, Interstate highways, rural electricity, and near-universal telephone service. And they did it by working together, private enterprise encouraged by visionary public policy. That’s how we built the place! But somehow, when it came to the roads and bridges and highways of the Twenty-first century—broadband—we forgot those lessons in cooperative infrastructure building and fell victim to a curious, wrong-headed and totally ahistoric assumption that broadband would get built without any special effort, absent any enlightened public policy encouragement, and that business would build it out even in those areas where business had no incentive to go. That cost us—a lot. We lost precious time. We lost golden opportunities. We fell behind other countries. It cost us in jobs, education, energy—you name it. Well, change has finally come. Opportunity is here. And maybe, just maybe, we can get this job done yet and put the United States of America where it needs to be in broadband—at the head of the line.

That means all of us planning together and pulling together. The Commission is trying to make the development of the national broadband plan as inclusive a process as we can. We seek private sector and public sector input. We are searching out traditional and non-traditional stakeholders of all types because everyone deserves to be heard, with special emphasis on folks who don’t have that corporate lobbyist or lawyer working for them in Washington—and that’s something the Commission hasn’t historically done very well. After all, shouldn’t a broadband policy *for* the American people be, to the maximum extent possible, a broadband policy *of* and *by* the American people, too? So this

process—and I think you all can already see this—is not going to be another one of those “inside Washington jobs.” At our FCC Meeting yesterday, we heard a four-and-a half hour report about what we’ve learned so far. But we’re only mid-stream, with this comprehensive ‘all-hands-on-deck’ enterprise, and we will continue to seek public input and good data on which to build a plan, and there will be lots more workshops with all kinds of stakeholders, and public hearings, too. This is the kind of outreach and conversation with the American people that I would like to see applied to all of our proceedings, and I believe that’s the direction in which the new FCC is moving. One of the great take-away lessons of the recent Digital Transition is that we do much better when we crawl out of that inside-the-Beltway cocoon that has enveloped—some would say “trapped”—us for so long.

You know, this broadband is such serious business. It’s not broadband for the sake of broadband. It’s broadband as the essential infrastructure that can enable us to tackle a host of urgent problems. Name the issue—creating jobs, providing more and better health care, tackling our crippling energy dependence, slowing the degradation of our environment, enhancing the education of our children and, indeed, all of us; opening the doors of opportunity for all. The successful resolution of any and all of these challenges has a broadband component to it. Every single one. That’s why I call broadband the “Great Enabler.” It will enable us to overcome so many problems and make so much progress.

Before I close, give me a minute or two to feed my passion. You know that I could never come to a Parker Lecture and not talk about media. Those of you who know me know how I feel about the state of our media. I’ll focus on broadcast although we all know that serious challenges confront all kinds of media. I’ll start by saying that 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. 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. ***The Internet opens wonderful new opportunities, to be sure—but what we have gained there hasn’t yet begun to match what we have already lost because of bad choices that have been made regarding traditional media.*** Bad choices by the private sector through, for example, heedless consolidation that saddled companies with unmanageable debt and sacrificed localism and diversity to uniformity and program homogenization. Bad choices by government through, for example, mindless deregulation—particularly on the part of the Commission of which I am a member—gutting most of the public interest protections that under-girded our media landscape for decades. These private and public choices exacted a heavy toll on consumers, on all our citizens and, in the end—as we’ve come to see—on the companies themselves.

We have been asleep at the public interest switch. We’d better wake up before it’s too late. With so few media dance-masters calling the tune, too few of the kind of stories that matter to the lives of the American people make it to our screens. Too little real hard-hitting journalism, too much infotainment. Too little local music, talent, culture, and diversity, too much monotonous monoprogramming. Too much special interest, too little

public interest. We are playing with fire letting this happen. We are taking huge risks with our democracy. We need to change that and we need to do it now. We need to get a grip on what's happening and we need to fix it.

My friends, I intend to continue speaking out loud and long at the FCC for media reform. You know, when a license renewal application comes in, maybe—just maybe—your FCC should be asking how that station is serving the interests of its locality. And maybe—just maybe—the answer should determine how we handle that application. Maybe we should be asking how stations are using all that new multi-cast capacity they were clamoring for in the DTV transition—just Doppler radar scopes and syndicated reruns, or new programs reflecting community life? We need a real dialogue about such things.

I am also pushing for a comprehensive FCC evaluation of the state of broadcast journalism. Study after study tells us that most Americans continue to rely for the bulk of their news on broadcast television and newspapers. We also know these enterprises are under economic strain, partly from the Internet, partly, I suspect, from their own bad decision-making. I believe the Commission's role, as the expert agency, is to understand the data and trends, and to share what is happening with Congress and the American people so we can develop some ideas for what the role of enlightened public policy might be. I'm preaching to the choir, I know, but I'm asking you to speak out now because this goes to the crux of not just media issues, but to all the other issues confronting our country. If the media isn't doing its job covering these issues, none of them will be satisfactorily resolved. It's as simple as that. Just as most of our really big issues have a broadband component as part of their solution, so too do they have a media component.

I conclude by saying thank you—to all of you assembled here—for keeping your eyes on the prize through the years. It's hard work—all good causes are. It's never easy. But if we can put these issues at the top where they belong, if we can continue to work together, plan smart, and really mobilize our families and friends and colleagues and brothers and sisters across the land, I think we can see this through to victory. And when we succeed—and succeed we *will*—we will have done a lot to realize the dreams of Dr. Everett Parker and to redeem the Promise of America. That's a fight worth making, don't you think?

Thank you very much.