

**STATEMENT OF  
FCC COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS  
FIELD HEARING ON BROADBAND ADOPTION  
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA  
OCTOBER 6, 2009**

Good morning and thank you for the kind introduction and the warm Carolina welcome. It's always good to be back home in South Carolina. And even though I'm from, diagonally, the opposite side of the state, I know what you know—there's no place like Charleston.

This hearing belongs to my new FCC colleague, Commissioner Mignon Clyburn. It was her great idea and she and her FCC staff put it together (with the help of a lot of South Carolinians over the past couple of weeks). I appreciate her letting me tag along. Mignon is already off to a great start at the FCC. I also want to salute Congressman Jim Clyburn who plays such an important leadership role in the House of Representatives. What a good fortune that is for South Carolina and, indeed, for all of us.

Speaking of good fortune, mine was working for 15 years for Charleston's own Fritz Hollings. I believe he's going to hook up with us at another broadband event at the Medical University this afternoon, but I can't let this opportunity pass without noting how much he did for this state. The fact that we're meeting here at Trident Tech brings it home because Fritz did so much by launching South Carolina's world-class technical education program when he was Governor. I could go on and on about him, but I'll just say he was my hero when I worked for him and he's my hero today.

Thank you to all the public officials who are with us today, to the distinguished panelists who will be speaking soon and, most of all, thanks to the good citizens of South Carolina who have gone to the time and trouble to turn out today to inform us and advise us on how to make sure we are all part of the new Digital Age.

Mignon and I shared a telecommunications platform here in Charleston five years ago when, as a state commissioner, she invited me to speak at the Conference for the Southeastern Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners. I talked that day about any number of telecommunications issues confronting the Commission, but I spent a good bit of time on broadband. I said then that getting high-speed, high-value broadband out to all our citizens was essential if we were going to be competitive in education, competitive in jobs, competitive in creating opportunity for our young people, for small businesses, for minorities—indeed, for all of us. To me, broadband is the great infrastructure challenge of our day. It is also the “Great Enabler” because it will enable us to tackle and surmount so many of the serious national challenges faced by your country and mine—whether it's creating jobs, opening the doors of equal opportunity, improving health care delivery, lessening our notorious energy dependence, tackling the degradation of the climate, the list goes on. Broadband isn't about just technology—it is the essential tool to bring us smart grids and medical records and telemedicine and information, and education so the little child on a distant farm or in the inner city has the

same kinds of tools to do her homework that other kids have. It's so people can find a job—did you know over 75% of Fortune 500 companies now hire off the Internet only? A resume arriving in the mail in a little white envelope won't get you very far with them. The jobs are on-line, the action is on-line. So we must be on-line, too.

Well, when I spoke here in 2004, we hadn't made much progress in getting broadband built-out. And we are still a long way from getting the job done in 2009. Truth is, government was asleep at the switch for too many years, thinking that somehow broadband would just magically appear—even in those places where there was no business plan to attract any business to build it. But the good news is that change has come. The good news is that Congress and the President have now provided what I have been calling for during the eight years I have been on the FCC—a National Broadband Plan. And, in what was really good news for me, they put the FCC at the center of getting this done. Our orders from Congress tell the FCC to deliver a broadband plan by this coming February. A plan to get high-speed, opportunity-creating broadband out all across this land. No one left behind. No more Digital Gaps. South Carolina has been on the wrong side of too many gaps too many times. Commissioner Clyburn and I are not about to let that happen again.

Which is why she and I are here. We want to hear from *you*. You know, Mignon and I don't have to worry about hearing from the big guys. We don't need to lose any sleep worrying about that. We know the powerful folks with lawyers and lobbyists will get a full hearing at the FCC—and that's fine, we need their expertise and insights. But we need to hear from more than just them. And it's not their fault if we don't—it's *our* fault. If broadband policy is going to affect education so profoundly, shouldn't we be out talking to teachers and school administrators and students, too? If it's going to affect health care delivery, shouldn't we be talking to local doctors, nurses, hospitals and—not so incidentally—patients? If it's going to affect how government delivers services to people, shouldn't we be talking to local mayors and a whole raft of other state, city and local officials? If it's going to affect America's competitiveness—an issue that Fritz Hollings cares so deeply about and does so much to educate us about—shouldn't we be talking to small businessmen and women around the country, so that the little business out in rural South Carolina trying to get traction can compete with the folks in the big city or in Tokyo, Seoul or Delhi? This isn't about some kind of feel-good, do-gooder policy-making—it's about helping make America competitive again in the global economic contest. I'm a firm believer in an old adage Senator Hollings used to remind us of quite often—“Decisions without you are usually decisions against you.” Mignon and I want you to be a part of this decision.

I spoke earlier about how we always managed to meet our great nation-building challenges. It was by looking to the future and pulling together to get there. It was relying on the great engine of American private enterprise, but with national needs and goals clearly in mind, so that the country had a vision and a sense of purpose and direction. That's how we built the place. And that's what we need now. Our new FCC has as open and transparent and participatory a process in place for this broadband exercise as I've seen in my years in Washington—and that's going on 40 soon. I want

every one of you to know that and to take full advantage of the opportunity. America can do it again, I'm confident of that—if we put our minds and muscle to it. If we are going to have a broadband communications policy *for* the American people, doesn't it make sense to try making it a policy *of* and *by* the people, too?

Again, my thanks for your hospitality and for coming and I'm all ears now.