

**REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
AMERICA'S DIGITAL INCLUSION SUMMIT
WORKING TOGETHER TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITY THROUGH
UNIVERSAL BROADBAND ACCESS
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Good morning. I'm here to introduce a thought—and a person. The person is greater than the thought, but I'm going to introduce the thought—or maybe actually a couple of them—before the person. You don't really have a choice about this, but thanks for your indulgence anyhow.

Two years ago, I could only dream about an event like this, bringing together journalists, thinkers, business men and women, advocates, consumers and so many shapers of public policy to talk about making sure that every American can participate in the new digital technologies that can open more doors of opportunity than perhaps any invention in modern history.

The subtitle of today's Digital Inclusion Summit—"Working Together to Expand Opportunity through Universal Broadband Access"—is music to my ears. For the nine years that I've been at the FCC, I've been hoping our country would make a commitment and develop a plan for the ubiquitous deployment and universal adoption of high-speed, high-value broadband. It took a lot of time and a lot of people working hard and definitely some new government thinking to make it happen—but happening it is, thanks in a major way to the person I will shortly introduce, my friend Congressman Ed Markey. Last year we got a charge from Congress and the President to get the job done, and next week—thanks to the vision and hard work of our Federal Communications Commission Chair, Julius Genachowski, and to the most in-depth, open and transparent process I can remember ever happening at the FCC—such a plan will be presented to Congress and to the American people.

Broadband is important not for technology's sake but because it can be our Great Enabler. This is technology that intersects with every great challenge confronting our nation—whether it's jobs, education, energy, climate change and the environment, international competitiveness, health care, equal opportunity or overcoming disabilities. There's no solution for *any* of these challenges that does not have a broadband component to it. So we have to work together—just as the Summit's title reminds us—to make that happen.

The going-in premise must be, first and foremost, that we will no longer tolerate having digital divides between haves and have-nots, between those living in big cities and those living in rural areas or on tribal lands, between the able-bodied and persons with disabilities. Everyone must have an equal opportunity in this new Digital Age, no matter who they are, where they live, or the particular circumstances of their individual lives.

But you know what? Even with our new government commitment, even with our forthcoming National Broadband Plan, even with all the enthusiasm I see in this room, it's no slam-dunk we'll get the job done. Let me cite just one area that illustrates the concern I have.

The country doesn't talk about it enough yet, but thanks to the Knight Commission Report, I think that's beginning to change.

I think many of us here agree that there is no greater benefit that broadband can deliver than its ability to help inform our civic dialogue and stimulate citizen engagement in our democracy. The future town square will be paved with broadband bricks, but how do we make that town square accessible to all? How do we ensure that it reflects the diverse voices of our diverse country?

As the Knight Commission Report so effectively points out, sustaining democracy in the Digital Age by effectively informing all of our communities is a core challenge for our still-young 21st century. There is good news. Already we see a blossoming participatory and experimental culture on the Internet. We see evolving new platforms that astound us, from smart phones to tablets to the advent of at-home 3-D viewing. We have the world at our finger-tips.

Yet even as Americans consumed 1.3 trillion hours of media in 2008, the production and distribution of essential news and information content has never been more in doubt. It will come as no surprise to many of you in this room that I have deep and abiding concerns about the state of our current media and our journalistic institutions. The same hyper-speculation and consolidation that infected so much of our economy, coupled with an almost total lack of public interest oversight of our broadcast media, decimated newsrooms, brought pink slips to many thousands of journalists, put investigative journalism on the endangered species list, and replaced too much real news with too much glitzy infotainment and, to be frank, with an often dumbed-down democratic dialogue. Our country cannot afford to have the same harms that have been visited upon traditional media today to undercut the potential of new media in the Digital Age.

But it may be happening already. All players are not yet equal in the new digital age, all networks are not open and pulsing with the lifeblood of Internet freedom, and what happens to us on the Internet depends not just on where we choose to go, but where others would have us go. We can all go to our homes or offices and send wonderful messages into the ether. How—or if—those messages ever get heard—how we keep them from evaporating into the ether—is an entirely different matter. What a lost opportunity it would be—what a tragic irony of history—if this liberating new technology ended, through no inherent fault of its own, by failing those who have struggled so long and hard for access to the tools of opportunity that they need to be full participants in society.

Think with me for a moment about just one group—our brothers and sisters who live with disabilities—to realize the importance of digital inclusion and broadband openness. I have had the wonderful and totally inspiring experience of working with many disabilities communities, beginning with my very first speech as a Commissioner to a deaf and hard-of-hearing audience in 2001. I was bowled over to see first-hand the obstacles standing in the way of what it was that they wanted—and what they wanted was no more than the opportunity to be fully productive and fully self-realized members of our society. And here were the new tools and services of the broadband era that could make such a difference for them—so close, but yet so far away. When we have people who seek no more than honest opportunity, when we have the tools to make it happen, and when we have this brief moment in time to combine the great

engine of our private sector with the kind of visionary public policy that has always guided America's great infrastructure build-outs, we dare not let the moment pass. This is our responsibility. It's not something that would be nice for us to do; it is these people's right—and I think it is a civil right—to have this kind of access, because access denied is opportunity denied.

I could deliver an entire speech on this subject, but there's someone here who can do that a lot better than me. A legislator—a leader—a visionary—and a super-achiever who has fought for people with disabilities, fought for inclusion, fought for access, and fought for us all. Since he was elected to Congress in 1976, this statesman—and I think “statesman” is the right word—has pointed America toward the North Star of opportunity for all. A list of his accomplishments would take up the morning's session. So let me just mention a few in the area of communications, not even getting into his monumental accomplishments in healthcare, energy and environment:

- First, there would be no broadband plan without him. It was Congressman Edward Markey who added the amendment to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that required the FCC to develop the National Broadband Plan.
- Congressman Markey was the primary House author of the E-Rate provision in the 1996 Telecom Act, providing funding to schools and libraries for access to advanced communications services. I think he even coined the term “E-Rate.” What a success that program has been!
- And he has recently introduced the “E-Rate 2.0 Act”—to strengthen and expand this important E-rate program.
- Congressman Markey was responsible for the successful passage of the 1990 law that required closed captioning for all TVs.
- In the current Congress, he has introduced the “Twenty-first Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act” (HR 3101) to help ensure that as technology changes, our nation's commitment to ensuring access for all keeps pace.

That's just a sampling and the list goes on, but you get the picture. Plus most of you know him well. Ed Markey is effective, eloquent and passionate about issues that I care about, you care about, and that all of America should care about. I know he's your friend, and I am proud—truly proud—to call him mine. Ladies and gentlemen, one of my most favorite people in Washington—or anywhere else for that matter—Congressman Ed Markey.