

STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER
MICHAEL J. COPPS
ON THE BROADBAND ADOPTION REPORT

When we issued our National Broadband Plan more than a year and a half ago, I was thrilled that, at long last, we had a national plan to encourage the delivery and adoption of high-speed, opportunity-creating, affordable broadband to all Americans. In adopting Universal Service and Intercarrier Compensation reforms last month, we began to address concretely the challenge of broadband deployment in unserved communities. But we did so cognizant that deployment is only part of the solution. Adoption is the other critical component, perhaps an even larger part of the nation's broadband challenge. So I am pleased that the Chairman has, among many other steps, focused attention on broadband adoption through the Connect to Compete initiative. I also greatly appreciate the fact that Commissioner Clyburn is lending her considerable expertise and commitment to the ongoing challenge of broadband adoption.

A significant and immediate step the Commission can take to improve broadband adoption is to use the Universal Service Fund's Low Income program to support broadband. I was looking forward to the opportunity to vote on reforms to the Low Income program, but it looks like that will not happen while I am still on the Commission. I do hope that it happens soon after I leave, and I will be watching intently as the new year begins.

Just as reforming the High Cost program does not guarantee ubiquitous broadband deployment, use of the Low Income program to support broadband will not guarantee ubiquitous adoption, but it is something substantive the Commission can do to help provide access to those who have spent too long on the broadband sidelines.

We must commit -- as a Commission and as a country -- to finding creative ways to get everyone connected. I appreciate the broadband adoption team's commitment to finding ways to encourage public-private partnerships and applaud those entities that have joined in efforts to make broadband more widely available and relevant to everyone by providing discounted access to broadband services and equipment as well as digital literacy training and resources. As I have said before, every one of our citizens must have access to broadband in order to participate fully in 21st century life. Access denied is opportunity denied, and the present condition of the country does not countenance our squandering any opportunities that are out there. And certain it is that we can no longer afford to have digital divides between races and ethnic groups, between haves and have-nots, between those living in big cities and those living in rural areas or tribal lands, between the able-bodied and persons with disabilities. So, I welcome today's report and thank the staff for highlighting the work that is being done—and the even heavier lifting that remains to be done—to make affordable broadband available to all.