

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: Children's Television Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters, MM Docket No. 00-167

I am truly pleased that we have before us today this item concerning the obligations of broadcasters toward children in the digital era. It is something I have wanted us to act on for a long time, and I thank the Chairman and my colleagues for their work on this, particularly over the last few days as we strove to improve the item that came to us. While none of us may call it perfect or everything we'd like to have, it is a huge step forward and something we can build on.

The Commission long ago recognized that broadcasters' public service responsibilities include providing programming that meets the needs of children. Indeed, Congress made that clear for us. In the Children's Television Act, Congress directed the Commission to protect children against excessive advertisements on television and required the Commission to consider during the license renewal process whether a station's programming has served the educational and informational needs of children. Yet, for too long, America's children have been ignored as the digital era unfolds. Today, the Commission takes important initial steps towards making sure we and our kids harvest the full benefits of digital television.

This is so important. Television plays such an enormous role in children's development. By the time the average child reaches adulthood, he or she will have watched over 10,000 hours of television and been bombarded with hundreds of thousands of commercials. Television has vast and growing powers to educate and inform — or to misinform in wrong and harmful ways.

We take several important actions in this item. First, broadcasters will need to increase the amount of children's programming commensurate with the increase in overall programming. Digital television promises high definition programming, multicasting, and datacasting that will literally transform free, over-the-air television by providing consumers new and valuable services. We provide broadcasters with the flexibility to take advantage of these new opportunities, but require that they do so in child-friendly ways. We ensure that programming for the young audience is broadcast with regularity and predictability. We provide parents with additional tools to locate and take advantage of educational and informational programming. And while we provide the needed opportunity to explore innovative new interactive technologies, we do so in a manner that protects children from excessive commercialization and we provide ample opportunity for corrective steps that may become necessary as the transition unfolds.

All of the steps we take today, however, will be meaningless unless the Commission enforces its rules. As we enter a new license renewal cycle, we must take seriously our obligation to ensure that broadcasters are meeting their responsibilities under the Children's Television Act. To this end, the Commission commits to seeking public comment and issuing a report on how well we are meeting Congress' objectives. We have further committed to a follow-up proceeding to make certain that we continue to protect children as technology advances. So an important outcome here is that we make these children's television obligations part of a living, ongoing process, regularly monitored and reported and open to new actions as the digital transition occurs.

All of these steps are important to guarantee that we do not return to a time when G.I. Joe, Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, America's Funniest Home Videos, the Jetsons, and the Flintstones were held up as examples of programs that met the educational and informational needs of children. Parents have a right to expect that a program that has reportedly been taken off the air in other countries due to excessive violence will not count as core children's programming here. Nor should parents have to worry that new technologies could be used to circumvent the advertising limits. We should all be concerned when recent independent reports find that one-fourth of the educational and informational programming served up to our children has little educational value.

This item should advance the quantity and quality of children's programming. Yet, there is much work left to do, both as regards children's TV and the more general public interest obligations of DTV broadcasters. So I look forward to our completing, hopefully very soon, the proceeding on public disclosure of broadcaster activities. Even more importantly, I hope we will get a broad and far-reaching NPRM issued in the next few weeks so that we can address the full range of public interest issues, including, among others, how the digital transition can enhance political discourse, improve access to the media for those with disabilities, and increase localism, diversity, and competition on the people's airwaves. The vast majority of television stations are already broadcasting in digital and some 400 stations across the country are already multicasting. And yet, those broadcasters do not know what they must do to discharge their public interest obligations on their new channels. Viewers are equally in the dark. We really can't delay any longer in bringing some certainty for both broadcasters and the public. If the American people are to realize the full benefits of DTV, we have to call the public interest issues forward and accord them the high priority they deserve. My hope is that both the disclosure item and the more general NPRM will be on next month's agenda.

Again, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you colleagues. Thank you Bureau. And a special thank you to our hard-working Eighth Floor staffs, some of whom were here until the wee hours this very morning improving the item.