

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: Review of the Emergency Alert System; Independent Spanish Broadcasters Association, the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ, Inc., and the Minority Media and Telecommunications Council, Petition for Immediate Relief, EB Docket No. 04-296.

No one who has lived through recent American history needs to be reminded of the importance of a warning system that reaches *all* of our citizens with timely emergency and public safety information. In order to achieve that goal, we need an Emergency Alert System that is more flexible, more robust and more compatible with the technologies that Americans are adopting in their everyday lives. In other words, EAS needs to move into the digital age.

One promising step is our adoption of Common Alerting Protocols (CAP), a standardized alert message format that will permit emergency messages to flow across various digital platforms and devices, thereby dramatically increasing the possible avenues for alerts to reach the public. The Commission also mandates the use of CAP's security functions to strengthen significantly EAS defenses against hacking, jamming, or other unauthorized use.

CAP is a positive step, but we still have much work ahead of us. I am particularly committed to take whatever steps we can to ensure that emergency and public safety information is fully accessible by persons with disabilities and residents whose primary language is not English. This includes EAS, but may involve other Commission rules and licensee obligations. We need to take a comprehensive view of whether these communities have access to the emergency information they need and deserve – and this is the ideal time to do it, when broadcast TV, radio, and all of our media are moving to digital. I thank the Chairman and my colleagues for taking a proactive approach and making these issues a priority. We need solutions, and we need them now.

I'm also pleased that we have given state governors the ability to trigger the mandatory EAS system. State and local governments play a crucial role in the EAS process. While the federal EAS system has never been activated, there are hundreds of state and local warnings issued every year. Our decision will permit state governors to activate the system – not only state-wide, but also for a geographically-targeted area affected by a local emergency. And I support the idea of looking at whether mayors or other local officials should have the authority to trigger EAS alerts as well.

While the move to digital promises great changes, one thing that will not change is the need to assess whether the system is operating properly. We have not done a very good job of that up to now. I appreciate my colleagues' willingness to clearly state that we intend to make sure that the system works, and to seek comment on the best method for doing so. The answer may involve additional testing, licensee certification, or after-the-fact reviews of system performance. Whatever the method, however, the American public deserves an EAS system that it can count on when the next hurricane or terrorist attack occurs.

I thank the Chairman for his willingness to issue a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to address these issues and for putting this proceeding on the fast track. We do not have the luxury of time. I look forward to working with my colleagues to bring this proceeding to a quick conclusion.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the presence of many in the disabilities community who have made the effort to attend our meeting today. We will need your continued assistance – as well as the assistance of those representing the non-English speaking community – as we work our way through these issues.