

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: DTV Consumer Education Initiative

We should have one overriding goal in this proceeding – to make sure that no over-the-air television viewer wakes up to a blank screen on February 18, 2009. Snow outside our front door might be fine on that cold winter day, but no one of us wants snow inside on our TV screen. Given the stakes—not only for television viewers but for so many others – including the public safety community and wireless service providers about to bid on the 700 MHz spectrum – one would think that by now DTV consumer education would be a major national priority.

Well, not yet. According to a survey done earlier this year by the Association of Public Television Stations, 61% of consumers said they had *no idea* that the transition is taking place. Contrast that with the United Kingdom, where 80% of the population is aware of their digital switch-over (occurring regionally between 2008 and 2012) and it becomes clear that we have a lot of catching up to do and not much time to do it.

One thing we can do immediately is to start making consumers aware that the transition is coming and – crucially – *why* it's happening and what's in it for them. The first message consumers hear should not be about how to get a converter box for a transition they've never heard of. To the extent consumers feel that this is something the government is doing *to* them rather than *for* them, we will face a very messy backlash.

Further, the consumer outreach must be conducted in a serious and coordinated way. Web sites and pamphlets are fine, but they're not going to get the job done. The best way to reach analog television viewers is through analog television programming. While voluntary efforts are welcome, compliance should not be left to chance or patchwork decisions by individual licensees. This is especially true in 2008. With space at a premium in a presidential election year, many licensees may be tempted to ease off their DTV education efforts and let others take the laboring oar. There must be a predictable and enforceable baseline to which all licensees adhere. I appreciate my colleagues' willingness to follow up on the suggestion of Chairman Dingell and Chairman Markey that the Commission consider requiring broadcasters to air DTV public service announcements and a rolling scroll.

We have a lot to do between now and February 18, 2009. Let's hope that today's action signals an all-out effort to make the transition happen as seamlessly as possible.