

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: *Inquiry Concerning the Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans in a Reasonable and Timely Fashion, and Possible Steps to Accelerate Such Deployment Pursuant to Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996*

It has been more than three years since the Commission last sought comment on America's broadband market in order to prepare its fourth section 706 report. I stated then my great dismay that our nation had fallen to 11th in the world in broadband deployment. And I dissented from the Commission's conclusion several months later that 11th in the world was somehow an acceptable state of affairs.

Never in my wildest imagination did I believe that 11th in the world would feel like the good old days. But it turns out that things *could*—and *did*—get worse.

To be sure, more Americans are connected to the Internet than three years ago and more have upgraded from dial-up. But that is cold comfort indeed. I doubt that anything in the world could prevent companies and consumers from taking at least *some* advantage of the astonishing advances in technology in the intervening years, in spite of the commercial and regulatory missteps that have dotted the road. The fact remains that America is now 15th in the world in broadband penetration according to the ITU, or 21st according to the same organization's newer Digital Opportunity Index. Whatever the measurement, the rest of the world is connecting and upgrading faster than us. And we continue to fall further and further behind even as broadband edges closer and closer to the center of our nation's economy and the world economy.

Can we finally agree that something drastic needs to be done?

We can start by facing up to our problem and doing our level best to diagnose its causes. We need to know *why* so many Americans do not have broadband, and *why* those who do (or think they do) are paying twice as much for connections one-twentieth as fast those enjoyed by customers in some other countries. This is not just an exercise in self-flagellation (though we certainly deserve that by now). Rather, it is the first step in coming up with some solutions that can start to reverse our nation's slide into technological and communications mediocrity.

If the Commission had prudently invested in better broadband data-gathering a decade ago, I believe we'd all be better off—not just the government, but more importantly, consumers and industry. We'd have a better handle on how to fix the problem because we'd have a better understanding of the problem. We would already have granular data, reported by carriers, on the range of broadband speeds and prices that consumers in urban, suburban, exurban, rural and tribal areas currently face. We would know which factors—like age, gender, education, race, income, disability status, and so forth—most affect consumer broadband decisions. We would understand how various markets respond to numerous variables. We could already be using our section 706 reports to inform Congress and the country of the realities of the broadband world as the basis for charting, finally, a strategy for the ubiquitous penetration of truly competitive high-speed broadband. I don't believe we'd be 21st in the world had we gone down that road. But that was the road not taken.

Fast forward to 2007 and—good news, bad news—we are asking, in a companion item released today, *how* to go about gathering such information. I think everyone at this table agrees on the need for improvements in our data collection objectives and procedures. But reality is that it will be years before we will have the benefit of the kind of FCC data we need to fill the gaps I have mentioned. This decade-long refusal to update our methodology is just not an acceptable outcome when we are, by statute, charged with encouraging the deployment of advanced communications services to all our citizens.

It is good news that the item we launch today, while late, is much, much better than its forerunners. And I do want to thank the Chairman for working with us to develop a set of questions that take us where we have not gone before. Today's item asks important questions about how the FCC can employ data and analysis from localities, states, private researchers, private-public partnerships, other federal agencies (like the General Accounting Office) and industry in order to fill in the gaps in our own data and analysis. Specifically, we seek comment on how to gather information on speed, price, international comparisons, and the many, many other factors that are part of a full picture of broadband in America. These are the right questions, and I am hopeful that interested parties will do everything they can to help the Commission develop an accurate picture about the true state of broadband in our country. I will certainly be watching to make sure that we make good use of the comments we receive to write an honest, revealing report on the state of broadband in American *circa* 2007—the year, some will remember, when the nation was promised access for all to broadband. We didn't achieve that goal, but a late start is better than no start and the time to re-dedicate ourselves to change is certainly now.

I thank the Bureau, too, for the significant improvements contained in this item and I look forward to frequent updates on how this is all proceeding.