

**STATEMENT OF
ACTING CHAIRMAN MICHAEL J. COPPS**

RE: *Applications Filed for the Transfer of Control of Embarq Corporation to CenturyTel, Inc.*, WC Docket No. 08-238

Today, we consider the merger of CenturyTel and Embarq—two wireline telecommunications companies operating in largely rural areas. A key question presented by the proposed transaction is: will rural America fare better or worse as a result of this transaction? Having looked at both the potential benefits and the potential harms that could result from this merger, I find that the scale tips in favor of permitting it to proceed.

As one example, I believe that rural consumers and wholesale customers will benefit from the merged entity's commitment to maintain service levels consistent with the better of the management and operating practices of the pre-merger companies. The service levels that Embarq has provided for wholesale operations will be maintained and, with the adoption of Embarq's Operation Support Systems by CenturyTel, the newly merged company will be wholly modernized in its order processing. In addition, the merged company will improve specific practices, including local number portability order processing, and will streamline interconnection agreement negotiations.

A major focus here is broadband and making sure that every corner of the country has high-speed, value-laden technology and service. I believe that the steps which the applicants make toward realization of this objective will move us in the right direction. As a result, the merged company will provide consumers in its territory with services they may not have seen before and had not expected to see in the near future.

This particular commitment goes significantly beyond the commitments of previous mergers, but it should not be construed as ideal. It should be regarded by no one as a standard or indicative of what to expect from the Commission when it considers future mergers or, for that matter, the national broadband plan that the Commission is currently pursuing. Our country is woefully behind many others in delivering real broadband to our citizens and, going forward, will have to raise its aspirations and expectations appreciably. Consumers, businesses, innovators and all of us as citizens should expect much more from national broadband policy than we have seen in recent years. Fortunately, we now, finally, have a genuine national commitment to get the job done.

I thank the Commission staff, the applicants, stakeholders and other concerned parties, and my Commission colleagues who put in significant time and effort to make sure that this transaction is consistent with the needs of rural America and, more generally, the public interest.