

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: *Applications of AT&T Inc. and Cellco Partnership d/b/a Verizon Wireless for Consent to Assign or Transfer Control of Licenses and Authorizations and Modify a Spectrum Leasing Arrangement*, WT Docket No. 09-104

Today's action brings closure to the Commission's 2008 decision to allow two large wireless companies, Verizon Wireless and ALLTEL, to merge. I expressed my concerns at the time about the impact this combination would have over the affected geographic footprint—especially with regard to consumer choice. Given our finding in the recent Mobile Wireless Competition Report that concentration in U.S. wireless markets has increased dramatically in recent years, the important role that this agency must play in advancing competition and consumer well-being has never been more clear. The decision to allow this merger, though, has already been made. The Order we adopt now takes an important step to help restore at least some level of competitive balance through the implementation of Verizon Wireless' divestiture of certain licenses and associated businesses, as required by the Department of Justice, to AT&T. Absent these divestitures, consumers in large parts of the country would have inevitably experienced less competition, higher prices and lower quality of service.

While I support this Order, the record and discussions surrounding it have served to highlight the continuing unacceptable state of telecommunications in much of Indian Country. The Pine Ridge Reservation—home of the Oglala Sioux Tribe—falls within two of the markets covered by today's decision. I saw first-hand the many challenges facing the Oglala Sioux in Pine Ridge when I visited less than a year ago. While progress has been made in telecommunications there against very heavy odds, there is still so far to go. Indeed there is so very far to go across Indian Country where, for the most part, state-of-the-art communications are strangers in the land.

As we work to tackle the challenge of broadband deployment and adoption throughout America, we must not lose sight of the sad reality that even plain old telephone service, which so many of us take for granted, is at the shockingly low level of less than 70 percent of Native American households. And we don't even begin to have reliable data on the status of Internet subscribership on tribal lands, because no one has bothered to collect it. Anecdotally, we know that broadband access on tribal lands is minimal—well below 10 percent. That's not just unacceptable. It's a national disgrace. Broadband is critical technology for the economic growth—perhaps even the survival—of these communities.

I recognize that addressing all the challenges and opportunities related to bringing Twenty-first century broadband infrastructure and services to Indian Country cannot be done within the confines of the narrowly focused Order we adopt today. That requires breathing new life into the trust relationship with Native Americans, and giving the issues of Indian Country true visibility here at the FCC, day-in and day-out.

We are finally getting onto that path. Earlier today, Chairman Genachowski announced the appointment of Geoff Blackwell to lead the agency's relationship with Indian Country and to oversee the implementation of the National Broadband Plan's recommendations to increase broadband deployment and adoption on tribal lands. I have had the privilege of working closely with Geoff before, and believe his leadership will do much to restore a productive dialogue between the FCC and the sovereign tribal governments. I continue to work with the Chairman and my colleagues to ensure the timely establishment of an Office of Tribal Affairs.

As for the specific problems that the Oglala Sioux Tribe has raised in this proceeding, I fully expect the recipient of the divested licenses, AT&T, to work in good faith with the tribe to find going-forward solutions that are beneficial for all. I am encouraged by the commitments and assurances that AT&T has recently made, and we will be monitoring their implementation very carefully. And, now with Geoff onboard, we have a real conduit for the FCC to hear the voices of the Oglala Sioux and all the Tribes as we work, government-to-government, to bring the enabling power of broadband to Indian Country.