

**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, as Amended by the Broadband Data Improvement Act; A National Broadband Plan for Our Future, GN Docket Nos. 09-137, 09-51, Sixth Broadband Deployment Report*

The sixth time is the charm. At last—a section 706 Report where broadband is really broadband, where zip codes are not surrogates for subscribers, and where the documented failure to connect millions upon millions of Americans disproves previous FCC findings that broadband is being reasonably and timely deployed. I am pleased to support the Broadband Deployment Report that we issue today.

Pursuant to section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, as amended by the Broadband Data Improvement Act—now section 1302(b) of Title 47 of the United States Code—the Commission is tasked with determining whether advanced telecommunications capability is being made available to *all* Americans in a reasonable and timely fashion. With that statutory mandate, Congress recognized how critical access to broadband is to the well-being of our country. Last year, Congress and the Administration reaffirmed the importance of broadband by charging the FCC to develop a national strategy for deployment and adoption. For all of the challenges this country faces—whether it's job creation, education, energy, climate change and the environment, international competitiveness, health care or equal opportunity—there is no solution that does not have a broadband component to it.

So while this may technically be the Sixth Report, it is—in my opinion—the first really credible effort by the Commission to deliver a report based on data of the quality and granularity needed to be truly responsive to Congress. With this Report, we have a much more comprehensive view of where our country stands when it comes to broadband availability, and we have measures for assessing our progress nationally and as compared with our global competitors.

By relying on an inadequate and unrefined approach to data collection for the previous five reports, the Commission seriously defaulted on its statutory responsibility. Going down the same old path here would have done a further injustice to this country's reinvigorated commitment to broadband. In early data collection exercises, the Commission used information from service providers that simply reported on which zip codes had at least one subscriber to broadband service at a speed of 200 kbps or higher. I still fail to see how anyone ever viewed this approach as indicative of anything useful. The false impression left by that approach was that everyone in a zip code was fully connected to high-speed broadband when all we really knew was that one person or business somewhere—perhaps on the very fringe of a zip code—subscribed to a minimum-speed service. That told us nothing about the extent to which broadband was available within a zip code or the quality of that service. Even though the majority of the Commission recognized the limited usefulness of the data in previous reports, it nonetheless concluded that the information was accurate enough to make a judgment about the state of broadband deployment for all Americans. As such, it found that the percentage of zip codes with at least one broadband subscriber—97% of the zip codes—adequately reflected the percentage of the population with access to broadband, and found, therefore, that all broadband was being deployed to all Americans in a reasonable and timely fashion.

Good data is a prerequisite to good policy choices. The five preceding reports lacked such data and the results were ... poor policy choices. This is even clearer now than it was at the time of those reports, given the depth of data we that has been mined as part of the lengthy, fact-driven process that resulted in the National Broadband Plan, including input collected from the newly-revised FCC Form 477 requiring providers to report broadband subscribership by Census Tract instead of zip code. The National Broadband Plan observed that in the United States today there are digital divides when it comes to access to high-quality, value-laden, affordable broadband, between the haves and have-nots, between those living in big cities and those living in rural areas or on tribal lands, between the able-bodied and persons with disabilities. Today's Report sadly confirms the existence of those digital divides. With these data-reliant observations, how could the Commission possibly continue to conclude that all is well and good when it comes to broadband deployment to *all* Americans? With our heads in the sand for so many years, is it any surprise other nations catapulted ahead of the United States in the broadband race?

To remedy the negative findings of the Report, the next step—as mandated by statute—is for the Commission to take immediate action to accelerate deployment of such capability through the removal of barriers to infrastructure investment and the promotion of competition in the market. Fortunately, through the recommendations of the National Broadband Plan, we have a sound path available to us. The findings of today's Report summon us to implement those recommendations and thereby address our statutory responsibilities. This Commission stands poised to move forward on such a path. As with all great infrastructure challenges this country has faced, we must move forward in a collaborative effort, where the Commission and industry, along with consumers, are working together for an America with ubiquitous, affordable, high-speed, value-laden broadband. While there is no doubt that broadband deployment and adoption have grown significantly over the last decade, we still have a long way to go to ensure that all Americans have broadband access.

While I support today's Report as one that is light years ahead of its prior iterations, there is still room for improvement. We must strive to make future reports even more detailed and thorough, particularly as broadband mapping information becomes available pursuant to the Broadband Data Improvement Act. In addition, it is critical that the United States understand, track and compare its approaches to broadband with those of our global competitors even more deeply than we do here. To that end, I hope to see a more in-depth global dimension to future reports. I am confident that the course we start down with today's Report will lead us to just such an outcome.

I commend everyone at the Commission—and they are many—who contributed their expertise and analysis to the production of this much-improved Report.