

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
APPROVING IN PART, CONCURRING IN PART**

RE: Section 257 Triennial Report to Congress; Identifying and Eliminating Market Entry Barriers for Entrepreneurs and Other Small Businesses

We recently celebrated the 15th Anniversary of the 1996 Telecommunications Act. While there is plenty to celebrate in terms of the innovation and technology that has blossomed since then, there is much less to celebrate in terms of accomplishments related to our Section 257 mandate. Too often, over the years, the Commission has actually gone in the wrong direction. Hopefully those days are past. Congress recognized the significance that barriers to entry could have on our telecommunications and media environments, but the FCC for many years instead spent an inordinate time actually erecting barriers by blessing out-of-control media consolidation and running away from our public interest oversight responsibilities.

It is increasingly important that the Commission have a strategic plan to eliminate barriers, because issuing a report every three years to Congress with a list of limited, isolated and non-strategic steps is not what the times demand. While each such little step may be well-intentioned, such an approach does not substitute for a viable program that promotes market entry for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Vice President Al Gore hit the nail on the head at the bill signing of the '96 Act, "If we do not see to it that every project, every network, every system addresses the public interest at the beginning, then when will it be addressed?" We are failing to meet our statutory requirements when the public interest does not stand at the forefront as our guiding principle.

I wish I could say that the Act had been implemented over the years in such a way as to foster a media environment with more diverse ownership, more local content, more independent production, and more competition. But statistics tell the opposite story. We have witnessed a 39% drop in the number of owners of radio stations in the last 15 years. Similar consolidation shrunk television. In 2010, there were 150 fewer owners of commercial TV stations—a 33% decrease. And, while 34% of the U.S. population consists of minorities, only about 3% of full-power commercial TV stations and 7.7% of radio stations are minority-owned.

Congress gave us some pretty clear media goals in 1996, telling the FCC to promote "diversity of media voices, vigorous economic competition, technological advancement, and promotion of the public interest, convenience and necessity." We have certainly seen some incredible technological advancement, but we have for years fallen far short in delivering on the diversity, competition, and public interest parts of our charge.

I am pleased that in the report before us we have identified some of the main barriers. This report represents an improvement over previous iterations, and I hope that we will use it to begin a frontal assault on barriers that are holding too many Americans--individuals and businesses--back. In this, we will be judged by concrete actions. Now is the time for action. Our media and telecommunications landscape, our civic dialogue, and our country will be better off when we reduce the barriers confronting minorities, women and small businesses as Congress directed us to do fifteen years ago.

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