

**REMARKS OF ACTING CHAIRMAN MICHAEL J. COPPS
TO THE FCC CONSUMER ADVISORY COMMITTEE
WASHINGTON, DC
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Good morning and welcome. I see a lot of old friends out there and it's always a pleasure for me to talk with this group that devotes so much time, energy and talent to improving the lot of consumers and all our citizens. And I'm happy to be here in my new role as Acting Chairman of the FCC so I can tell you that for as long as I have anything to say about it, the input and recommendations of our advisory committees are going to get the attention and serious consideration that they deserve. You folks work long and hard trying to help us—even when you must have wondered sometimes whether anyone was really listening. I can assure you that someone is listening now.

It's time to change all that. It's time for the CAC—and all of the advisory committees at the FCC—to be restored to their position as valued and independent counsel on the important communications policy issues we face.

We have such a diverse group with us today – I am pleased to welcome tribal and local governmental organizations, consumer groups, and industry. In particular, I'm pleased to have with us today representatives from LCCR and N4A, two organizations that have played, and will continue to play, prominent roles in providing community-based DTV outreach and assistance to consumers across the country. Your efforts are much appreciated, and in the coming weeks will be even more vital.

I've spoken to you many times before, and I've never sugar-coated my concerns. The next few weeks are going to be extremely difficult—as difficult as any that this Commission, and millions of TV consumers, has ever faced. That's because we never really dug deep enough to understand all the consequences that would attend the DTV transition—not just the intended good results, but all the unintended consequences, too, the ones that usually cause the big problems. It's because we didn't have a well thought-out and coherent and coordinated plan to ease the transition—a plan to combine the resources we needed to avoid disruption. I've been pushing for a long time for this kind of coordinated, private sector-public sector partnership, wherein we leverage off the resources of one another—to get a job done that no one sector can accomplish alone. And it's also because we didn't have a sense of real urgency until it was too late.

I know many of you shared these concerns. You knew that a patchwork of disjointed efforts wasn't going to get the job done. You knew that increasing general awareness wasn't enough and that we needed to focus on the more difficult challenge of educating consumers about how the transition affects them personally and what they need to do to prepare.

Unfortunately, things don't look any better now that I've had a chance to look under the hood since becoming Acting Chairman. If anything, they look worse.

At this point, we will not have—we cannot have—a seamless DTV transition.

There is no way to do in the 26 days new leadership has had here what we should have been laser-focused on for 26 months. That time is lost—and it's lost at a cost. We cannot make it up. There is consumer disruption down the road we've been on. We need to realize this. We need to plan for it. And we need to do whatever we can to minimize it and then to repair it. This has been the focus of my one week and one day running this place.

I wish we had more time and additional resources to prepare, and maybe we will get them yet. Right now we've got a February 17 date and we need to deploy the resources to deal with that. All I can promise is that we will do everything we can in the next 18 days to make things work at least a little better for consumers, and then to deploy what resources are left to clean up after whatever dislocation occurs.

Here are a few of the things we are doing:

- First, we are coordinating much more closely, within the FCC, with NTIA and other entities, with the diverse levels of governments and with the private sector. Our teams are more tightly organized and interwoven. They're coordinating non-stop and acting with truly admirable dedication and a high sense of urgency.
- Second, we've stepped up our efforts to maximize the number of consumers nationwide who will have access to an Analog Nightlight station. That program will help consumers who aren't ready on the transition date to understand what happened and how they can restore service.
- Third, we are developing a plan to improve consumer outreach—coordinating and focusing our field operation, website, and outreach grants on the “how to” information that will help consumers prepare for February 17. I want to thank Commissioner Adelstein and his staff for the special efforts they are making in this regard.
- Fourth, we've also focused on more tangible consumer support—expanding our capacity to handle consumer questions and identifying potential sources of in-home assistance to those who need it, and that includes vulnerable populations such as seniors, folks with disabilities, and those for whom English is not the primary language.
- Fifth, we're spending a lot of time coordinating the multiple private and public sector call centers that are in development into a much more unified system. We are trying to give consumers one number to call for assistance from the combined resources of the cable, broadcast and satellite industries, as well as NTIA and FCC. In the absence of so many of the things we should have been doing, call centers really become the essential consumer life-line. And I want to thank Commissioner McDowell and his team for the help they are giving this effort.
- Sixth, we've been proactively examining broadcast coverage issues to try to determine which consumers are most at risk of losing reception because of the transition. And let's make sure we all understand this: some consumers, through no fault of their own, are going to lose one or more channels as a result of the transition. They may pick up other channels that they previously couldn't receive or the current ones may come back later as stations deploy Distributed Transmission Systems or make other arrangements, but on February 18, some homes will not pick up all the stations they are receiving now. All the

“how to” advice in the world won’t help a consumer if the signal doesn’t reach them. We have a deep and serious obligation to get this word out, proactively, so consumers know what’s happening and understand what options may be available to them. That we did not understand this better long ago through better analysis, tests and trial runs is, to me, mind-boggling.

We can’t expect people to prepare for what’s coming unless we tell them what’s coming. Trying to mobilize this kind of nationwide messaging in the 18 days remaining requires everyone working together to develop, produce and disseminate it. We’re working hard on this, but at this late date, we’re going to need a lot of help at the community level—folks like you, businesses, consumer groups, service organizations of every stripe, local governments, houses of worship—and what an important role religious organizations can play, both in getting the word out and delivering assistance to vulnerable populations.

One more thing. This Committee has repeatedly recommended that the FCC convene a technical working group to address digital closed captioning and video description issues. I believe this is again on your Agenda for today. I have long supported that proposal, but did not have the ability to act. Now I do. So I am instructing Commission staff to convene the technical working group as soon as possible. The FCC needs to take a leadership role in addressing these problems. I don’t believe we can finish this important effort before the transition date. Had we acted when you first made the recommendation, maybe we could have. But this is not the time to cast stones back over our shoulders; it’s time to look forward and commit ourselves to working together—government, industry, and consumers—to solving these problems.

At the end of the DTV transition, good things await us. Better TV. More free, over-the-air broadcasting. More channels which, if properly utilized, can replenish some of the localism and diversity that we have lost over the past couple of decades. More spectrum for public safety so that we can hopefully build that nationwide, interoperable public safety network to help first responders help us when disasters, natural or man-made, strike again. More spectrum for wireless, more for broadband so we can take our rightful place at the head of the list of nations in getting this opportunity-creating technology out to all our citizens. These are the reasons we started down the digital transition road in the first place.

Our shortfalls were (1) so grievously underestimating the effort it would take to make the switch-over smoothly and (2) failing to build the kind of truly coordinated and synergistic private-public sector partnership that would have allowed us to combine our resources and deploy them toward a consumer-friendly outcome.

Many people have worked very, very hard on this transition. Industries—broadcasters, cable, satellite, consumer electronics and others. Local, state and federal government workers. Community, religious, civil rights and many other organizations. My own FCC team. They didn’t fail us; we failed them in not mobilizing the kind of effort wherein they could all work together, in a truly organized and directed fashion, to make for a better and less disruptive transition. I thank them all.

In closing, I would like to thank the members of this outstanding Committee for your great efforts to help everyone understand, long ago, the extent of the problems we were going to encounter and for your recommendations to do something about them. Now we need you more than ever—first in meeting this clear-and-present challenge, and then in moving forward to make sure that each and every consumer in this great land can partake fully of the wonderful opportunities that 21st century communications are creating. So thanks for signing up to help. Each of you has busy lives, and you come here at great sacrifice to help us better understand and serve the needs of consumers. I truly appreciate that, and I hope you know I am going to be doing everything I can here at the Commission to make your service really count in good results for consumers and all our citizens.