

REMARKS
FCC ACTING CHAIRMAN MICHAEL J. COPPS
AMERICAN RECOVERY & REINVESTMENT ACT OF 2009
BROADBAND INITIATIVE KICK-OFF
WASHINGTON, DC
MARCH 10, 2009

Thank you, Anna, for your kind introduction. The Commerce Department is lucky to have such a terrific FCC alum to help steer the ship—and that from a Commerce alum who's gone to the FCC! This is a great day. I am so pleased to be back in this beautiful hall of Commerce where I see many old friends who bring back many good memories of my years here in the 1990s. And it's great being here with Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and Commerce's Acting Chief of Staff Rick Wade to launch, at long last, a proactive broadband build-out for our country. I also want to recognize and thank my friend and colleague from the FCC, Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein, who is here and who has been working tirelessly at the Commission as an advocate for rural broadband.

Together we have been asking for years: Where's the policy for broadband? Where's the action? Where's the national commitment? Where's the beef?

The fact that we are here today talking about President Barack Obama's commitment to bring broadband to the four corners of this country—fueled by his belief that it is key to this country's economic recovery—should be evidence enough to everyone here—if you need any more evidence—that change has truly come to Washington.

Seven years ago, shortly after I went to the FCC, the Commission issued another of its Congressionally-mandated Section 706 Reports about whether advanced telecom services were being deployed around America in a reasonable and timely manner. The answer always was yes, everything's great, don't worry, be happy. I wasn't happy and I did worry. Just last week, we got another of those many reports telling us how far the United States has fallen in the ranking of nations when it comes to broadband—this one from the International Telecommunications Union concluding that your country and mine has now slipped to a dismal 17th. Too few consumers and small businesses in this country have the high-speed broadband they need if they're going to succeed. We pay too much for service that is too slow. It's holding us back as individuals; it has cost our economy billions; and things are only going to get worse if we don't do something about it.

Now, thanks to the vision of the President and the foresight of Congress, we *are* doing something about it. The years of broadband drift and growing digital divides are coming to an end. We begin to understand how key broadband infrastructure is to the future of each and every one of us.

Broadband is the central infrastructure challenge of our time. Earlier generations of Americans, going all the way back to the beginning, met and mastered their own great infrastructure challenges—they built roads and turnpikes and bridges to get settlers’ produce to markets back east; they built regional and then vast transcontinental railroads to bind a burgeoning nation together; they put power lines and basic telephone service out to every hamlet in America; they built a great web of Interstate highways to deliver the mobility we all wanted. They did it by working together, innovative private enterprise encouraged by far-seeing public policy. But we forgot those lessons in how to build our country when it came to the roads and highways and bridges of the Twenty-first century—high-speed broadband. So we lost precious time. We lost golden opportunities. We short-changed our economy, our kids, ourselves. Well, today we say: “Enough.” We mobilize and we begin to build.

And I am pleased that the recently-enacted and altogether historic Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 gives the FCC an important role to play in turning our new national commitment into a workable national strategy. We are already hard at work on the job. It is my intention that at our next full Commission meeting, on April 8, we will kick-off an open, participatory, public process with a far-reaching Notice of Inquiry to marshal the data and expertise we need to make sure we meet our legislatively-mandated date of one year for presenting Congress and the American people a national broadband strategy worthy of the name. In doing so we will put the FCC in the position of having the hard data necessary to support sound policy-making for the future. And working with NTIA, we will have important new tools—like a national broadband map—to help us gauge how the efforts begun today are progressing.

This will be a truly inclusive process. It will have comprehensive private sector and public sector input. It will ask the tough questions that must be answered if we are to succeed. It will search out a myriad of traditional and non-traditional stakeholders who deserve to be heard: consumers, industry, labor, public interest organizations, local, state and federal government—all the agencies gathered here for openers, but very likely just about every other agency of government, too. Because the goal of our national strategy must be to bring value-laden, high-speed broadband to *all* our citizens, no matter who they are or where they live, rural or urban, affluent or needy, living in a comfortable condo or a not-so-comfortable tribal land, physically able or dealing with a disability. “All” must mean everyone.

And we will endeavor to ignore no sector of our national life. Stop to think about it for a moment. What doesn’t broadband impact as we look to the future of America? Not just the basic ways we communicate with one another. But health care information technology and the need to computerize medical records. Better utilization of scarce energy resources through the use of smart grids. Higher education and the needs of schools, libraries and students as they gear up for the Twenty-first century. More efficient agriculture. Better housing. Public safety and cybersecurity. Education. The environment. Each of these presents its own questions and new opportunities which need to be examined as part of a national broadband plan.

I should note that, as a preliminary step, today the Commission issued a Public Notice asking for comment on how there can be better inter-agency coordination of broadband initiatives in order to develop a report on a rural broadband strategy by May of this year, in response to the most recent Farm Bill passed by Congress. This is just a first step in the larger picture, but one that should have been addressed by the Commission more seriously many months ago.

So I am pleased to be here as part of this inter-agency effort to put us on a real road to broadband—a road carefully laid out, funded and incentivized, and solidly built to meet our country’s pressing needs. If business, government, and stakeholders of every kind all work together to make this happen, it *will* happen. We *can do* this job. Success will be measured in jobs for our people; better health, education, and self-fulfillment for each of us as individuals; and renewed economic opportunities for our country’s goods and services around the world. Talk about the game being worth the candle! This is precisely how we built this country of ours, infrastructure challenge by infrastructure challenge. And it is how we will get it growing again and keep it great.

Thank you for having me here, and consider me and the agency I have the privilege of representing here signed up for the duration.