

REMARKS OF FCC COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
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Thank you Reverend Jesse Jackson and RainbowPUSH for inviting me once again to be on your program. As a regular attendee, I always look forward to getting together with you. And thank you, Julia and David, for your participation and warm welcome.

Jesse Jackson has always been about change, about taking every opportunity to build new opportunity, and seizing the moment when the moment exists. That opportunity for change, growing out of the formative work Reverend Jackson has done for decades, is with us now. And if we're smart we'll seize that moment Jesse did so much to create, seize it now, use the opportunity while we have it, and get some good things done. History rides on strange tides. It ebbs and flows. You'll get years of change and real reform. But then come years of reaction and inaction and nothing much happens in the way of fundamental change. We've just been through eight years of the latter and, really, that's been the story for most of the past 30 years. That's a long time in the wilderness. But last year the people decided they'd had enough of that, so they sent new leaders to Washington, new leaders to government generally. Opportunity knocked.

But here's the rub. Nobody knows how long this opportunity lasts. That window for reform opened, but we're not quite sure how far it opened. And nobody knows how long it will stay open. Where we can reform now, we should do it. Where the process will take longer, let's at least make some serious down-payments while we work on more fundamental solutions. I don't want to come back here a year from now and have us sit around slapping our heads and saying "Gee, why didn't we do that when we had the chance?" That, my friends, would be the loss of a truly historic opportunity. And I think future generations of reformers would, rightly, castigate us for it.

There's good news. For eight years I had been calling for a national broadband strategy. To me, getting high-speed, high-value broadband out to all our citizens is the central infrastructure challenge of this first half of the Twenty-first century. If we fail, the diversity gaps and rural gaps and inner city gaps and technology gaps and regional gaps that have been such brakes on our progress can only get worse—much worse. It's ironic but true that digital development wrongly done could actually make things worse.

So it was great news that the FCC was put to work to craft a national broadband plan. It's due on February 17th. To help us get it right, we've cast a wide net at the FCC to make the process of developing the national broadband plan as inclusive as possible. We've searched out to a myriad of traditional and non-traditional stakeholders that deserve to be heard, with special emphasis on folks who don't have that corporate

lobbyist or lawyer working for them in Washington—and that’s something we haven’t historically done very well. A broadband policy *for* the American people should be, after all, a broadband policy *of* and *by* the American people. So our FCC process—and I think you all can already see this—is not going to be another one of those “inside jobs.” It is more open, public and transparent than any process I’ve witnessed at the Commission, and it is backed by sufficient resources for wide citizen participation and outreach. We’ve already held dozens of workshops and numerous field hearings, and more are planned in order to engage the public on what their needs are and what a national broadband plan should include. One of the great take-away lessons of the recent Digital Transition, whose latter days I got to preside over, is that we need to get out of our inside-the-Beltway cocoon. We did that with DTV and it helped a bunch. With broadband, just like with DTV, we need to spread the word, inform citizens about the benefits of going online and show them how it can improve their lives.

It is very important that Rainbow PUSH and other groups speak directly to their various constituencies about broadband opportunities. Tell the story. But first live the story. Lead by example. Are your leadership organizations developing Twenty-first Century models that your members can emulate and learn from? Are you encouraging them to think out-of-the-box about “brick and mortar” business models and pursue online entrepreneurial opportunities that may be less expensive to start up? How do you move your advocacy to an online model that will continue to capture the youth? Just maybe the content and online experience offered by public interest and civil rights groups should be part of the content that attracts different neighborhoods and communities to the broadband experience. You can help bridge the digital divide by becoming a destination, an organizer, a facilitator – online! Make sure especially that young people, those in K through 12, understand the value of today’s technology tools and achieve broadband literacy. Teach them how to use this technology. And warn them how technology wrongly used can abuse them. These are the entrepreneurs and leaders of tomorrow, but we’ve got to begin taking care of them today.

I was pleased that Chairman Genachowski decided early in his tenure to launch a proceeding on network neutrality. The genius of the Internet is its openness, its dynamism, its availability to one and all. We’ve got to keep it that way and, in an age when the technology and the business incentive exist to thwart that openness, we need an openness policy on the books and a place to enforce it. Anyone looking to create new opportunities, to build digital inclusiveness, and to make the availability of advanced telecommunications something tantamount to a civil right should be on-board with the principle and working to make sure it works as intended. Let me put it plainly—no one will benefit more from the opportunities of an open Internet than those who have suffered lack of opportunity for generations. It would be a lost opportunity of huge proportions for diversity groups and civil rights organizations to be doubting Thomases when it comes to the bedrock of preserving Internet openness. Surely we should be looking closely at how network neutrality works and certainly we should be working together on the complex judgments that will be called for to make it work for everyone. But we

should be working to make it work, not to attack the principle itself and thereby give aid-and-comfort to its opponents.

You know I never come here without talking about media, so let me spend a couple of minutes on that great passion of mine. For years you and I have tried to do something about the deplorable state of minority and female ownership. A bad story only gets worse. You know the data, you know the reality, better than I do. So as soon as I became Acting Chairman of the Commission in January, one of my first priorities was to get our FCC Diversity Advisory Committee reconstituted. We did that and recruited a truly impressive group of individuals to serve as committee members and to help the Commission identify ways to spur increased employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in media for minorities and women. I immediately charged the new Committee to give the Commission recommendations on such initiatives as full file review—an interim method for program eligibility that could enable more entities to take part in our ownership incentive policies. I also had asked the Committee to give us recommendations to update our *Adarand* studies, because before we put permanent new policies in place, hopefully based on socially and economically disadvantaged business criteria, we need to have the legal underpinnings to defend them in court. The Diversity Committee responded to the call and in September sent our Chairman a bold set of recommendations directed at full file review, *Adarand* studies, and other ideas, too. I thank them for it. Several years ago, a previous Diversity Committee sent recommendations to a previous FCC chairman. Those recommendations went into some pigeon-hole and nothing was heard about them for almost two years. These new recommendations will, I hope and trust, be turned quickly around so we can put some justice back into our ownership policies. I hope we all remember the old adage, “Justice delayed is justice denied.” Let’s move while we have the chance!

Recently, the Commission launched its Quadrennial Review of our media ownership rules. It’s an important review. Most of you know I have been critical of the excessive media consolidation our ownership rules have condoned over the past many years. And I don’t believe the tsunami of consolidation is over yet. Minorities have suffered greatly because of consolidation, both in the type of homogenous programming that excludes so much of our diverse culture from the airwaves and from diminished ownership and management opportunities. I believe our new Quadrennial review can be an important tool for getting a handle on big media run awry.

But let me caution—as strongly as I can—against using the Quadrennial Review process as the one-and-only venue to address all the many media concerns and issues before this Commission. There are a range of issues impacting ownership diversity that need to be—and can be—addressed *right now*. I just talked about one. There are interim things we can do on minority and female ownership. Similarly, we could move ahead today on a credible public interest licensing system for broadcasters. There’s no excuse for this system we have wherein every eight years a licensee sends in not much more than a postcard and, slam-dunk, the license is re-upped without so much as a look to see if that

station is serving the public interest. There is no reason on God's green earth why the Commission shouldn't go back to having some guidelines to make sure stations are consulting with their audiences on what kinds of programming people would like to see and that news and information aren't the first thing to go on the chopping block when ownership changes hands. I've been begging the broadcasters' representatives in Washington to join this discussion for years. They refused. Maybe they shouldn't be surprised that some folks are asking if there might not be better uses for their spectrum. I have not joined that call, but neither do I think that more of the same will get them by.

Let me close by asking again: How do we optimize this unique window of opportunity for change that we have open before us? Will we squabble about who has more pressing needs—those in rural areas or those in urban areas? Will we wait for the federal government to make all the decisions and then express our concerns? Will we insist on picking and choosing which broadband technologies are favored in this process? Will we see a broadband plan as a zero sum game? Will we just wait to move on public interest media until the moment has passed us by? Will we allow diversity's hour to become diversity's missed opportunity?

It's time for all of us who believe in change to make change happen. Otherwise... change won't happen. I hear the sound of a trumpet calling us to battle. It's not an uncertain call. Only our response can be uncertain. Let's all pull together and pull hard and pull now and make these years our children will look back upon with pride.

Hope is alive. Keep change alive.

Thank you very much.

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