

**REMARKS OF FCC COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
DIGITAL TELEVISION SWITCH-OVER IN WILMINGTON, NC
SEPTEMBER 8, 2008**

Mayor Saffo, Chairman Martin, Secretary Baker, Distinguished Guests. This is a very big day—certainly here in Wilmington and ultimately I hope for the rest of the country when it follows your lead next February. In less than two hours, Wilmington will become the first market in the United States to flip the switch on the digital future. That makes you much more than just the answer to a trivia question. It makes you true digital pioneers. First in flight, first in digital, and first in the hearts of the FCC!

I know being first is not easy. You didn't have a DTV playbook to memorize, or any history to fall back on. That's what makes this test so important. You are actually helping to *write* the playbook for the rest of America!

I do wish that more communities had stepped up to the plate like Wilmington. We'd have a fatter playbook for next February if we could run tests like this in markets with different terrains and different demographics. But we still have a lot to learn from Wilmington.

Which leads me to make a last request. I know you may be sick of the DTV transition at this point. Maybe after today you'd just as soon never think about it again. Perhaps you've seen enough of the FCC to last you a lifetime. That's completely understandable. But let me ask you one last favor. We need to really *learn* from what you've just experienced. I know that the NAB and others will be here doing follow-up and I thank them for those efforts. But—very, very importantly—the FCC has some serious responsibilities to gather and distill and analyze and disseminate far-and-wide the lessons we learn here. So the Commission will be on the ground here after today and I look forward to everyone working together to learn everything we possibly can from this experience.

What kind of information do we need? Just about anything you can think of. Which messages worked and which didn't. Where you found helpful information. Whether you chose to buy a converter box or hooked up to cable or satellite or went out and bought a digital TV. Whether those of you who needed a converter box with analog pass-through were able to find one. Whether you needed a new antenna to receive digital. Whether you were caught unprepared for the switch, and why. On a broader scale, how local broadcasters coordinated with cable and satellite and local retailers. And how local governments and local civic and religious organizations coordinated with each other and with their fellow citizens. Also, for those who bought new digital TVs, what's happened to all those old analog sets, because communities around the country will face the problem, just like you did, of where to put all those old sets and receivers. Without some planning, there could be some serious adverse environmental consequences to all this.

I could go on and on about things we need to know, but you get the point. There is no substitute for real world experience. And you are the people who have it—and probably the only people who *will* have it before the nationwide transition next February. So we really need your input, the benefit of your experiences and perspectives, in the days just ahead.

You know, in addition to a better picture and better sound, DTV brings another huge potential reward. I'm talking about the ability of broadcasters, using the new digital technologies, to send out four, five or even six different program streams on the same amount of spectrum where they can broadcast only one stream in analog. In this age when we seem to have so much homogenized, nationalized fare on our airwaves, think about the possibility here of more real local news, better coverage of community, cultural and athletic events, more stories about all the groups who make up our communities, and an enhanced civic and political dialogue. What a step forward that would be for diversity and localism in our media! I hope broadcasters and communities will work together to help make this dream come true.

Let me close by offering my deepest thanks and appreciation to those who made this happen. Chairman Martin, who took this idea, ran with it and provided strong leadership to actually make the Wilmington test happen. Mayor Saffo who showed a real profile in courage in taking this on, and other local, municipal and county officials who worked on making this a success. Local broadcasters, cable and satellite operators, retailers and so many other local businesses. The local churches, schools, civic and many other groups and organizations that pitched in—they played a huge role. Secretary Baker and NTIA who worked so hard on the converter box program. And, so importantly, our FCC staff. These folks are public service personified. We hear so much silly talk from the political hustings lambasting “government bureaucrats.” Well they're real people, working hard and dedicated to getting things done. You've had some of the best and the brightest on the ground here preparing for this test and many of you know first-hand whereof I speak. We all ought to take pride in the public service they give. Finally, thanks to all the good people—*especially* all the good people, of Wilmington. You're reaching the digital summit ahead of the rest of us. I think you'll find the climb was worth it--I hope so. Thank you all for performing a significant public service for the rest of the country.

Thank you very much.