

**SEPARATE STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS, APPROVING**

Re: *In the Matter of Third Periodic Review of the Commission's Rules and Policies Affecting the Conversion to Digital Television – MB Docket No. 07-91.*

One year earlier would have been the charm. Sometimes timing is everything, and here a year's earlier start might have been the difference between a seamless and a chaotic Digital TV Transition. Had we acted then, we could have established a far more measured and orderly switch-over process, and the difficult trade-offs and compressed schedules contained in this Order could have been largely avoided. If a dissent could legitimately be based on frustration at being stuck in this situation, I would dissent today—I am that frustrated by our inaction.

But we are where we are. Given that fact, I think the Order does an acceptable job of balancing the various technical and policy factors in play. Unfortunately, at this point, the transition will not be as smooth as it might have been. Not every consumer will have access to all of their analog broadcast channels on February 17, 2009 and then wake up happily the next morning to those same stations in digital. There will be some period of time—perhaps before the transition date and almost certainly after—in which some stations may not be able to provide service to all of their viewers. Thankfully, the Order adopts our earlier proposal to require every broadcast station in the country to file a DTV status report this February—telling us where they are, what more they need to do, and how they plan to get there. Those reports should give us a much better picture of specific issues that may arise—hopefully, with enough time to address them.

Pulling the switch on stations all across the land at one and the same time in February 2009 is going to be a real throw of the dice. It is unfathomable to me that we are planning to turn off every full-power analog signal in the country on a single day without running at least one test market first. Other countries are transitioning over time, with phased schedules. The United Kingdom, for example, is transitioning between 2007 and 2012, region-by-region, learning at every step along the way and making the necessary adjustments. The UK recently transitioned the small town of Whitehaven as the first step in a multi-year transition plan; a few years ago, Germany took a similar step in Berlin. The lessons learned from those initial test markets doubtless will prove invaluable to those countries' broader transition efforts. We need some of that real-world experience here. Why in the world aren't we doing that? I am encouraged that the Chairman and my colleagues are willing to sit down now and begin exploring the idea of one or more DTV demonstration projects around the country. I recognize there may be legal, technical, and practical challenges with planning and conducting such a test this close to the national transition date. But I believe it can be done. At least—for the sake of a successful DTV transition—let's hope it can.