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STATEMENT OF
MICHELE COMBS
VICE PRESIDENT OF COMMUNICATIONS
THE CHRISTIAN COALITION OF AMERICA

BEFORE THE:
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

DECEMBER 15, 2009

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Good afternoon Commissioners and staff members of the Federal Communications Commission. My name is Michele Combs, and I am the Vice President of Communications for the Christian Coalition of America. Thank you for inviting my organization to participate at this important work shop.

Use of the Internet has allowed the Christian Coalition to amplify the voices of millions of hard-working, pro-family Americans in a way that has revolutionized their ability to be heard and to engage in the political process.

The Christian Coalition is excited about its ability to use the Internet to reach millions of our members world wide. Today, our members can follow the Christian Coalition through our Twitter Tweets, Facebook updates, YouTube messages, our frequentl, daily blogs posts, or our email blast. And, users can use Digg to bookmark our conent to friends. Last year, during the Presidential election, thousands and churches were able to download our Presidential and congressional voter guides. In the last two cycles, we've distributed over 100 million of these voter guides. The Internet has made these distributions easy and inexpensive. As you can see, increasingly, our members are using Internet social media tools to connect with the Christian Coalition.

In fact, right now, our home page features a link for our Twitter users to engage in the health care debate in Congress. On this page, we encourage our members to do five things that only the Internet allows us to do:

- (1) Sign an online petition.

- (2) Tweet a link to our online Action Center.
- (3) Tweet a message to their member of Congress.
- (4) Tweet messages about health care to their friends. And,
- (5) Tweet our Christian Coalition homepage to their friends.

Our Web page also links to YouTube, where the Christian Coalition maintains a Christian Coalition channel, where our members can watch and listen to discussions about policy debates we are involved in. And increasingly, our site incorporates embedded videos, which make our site more informative and user-friendly.

The mobile world enables the Christian Coalition to reach our members directly – without a big media filter -- on a real time basis through text messaging and Tweets. This is extremely important to help our members engage in the political process, especially when there is a time-sensitive vote that is happening in Congress or in a State Legislature.

For example, in 2005, an amendment was introduced to the Bankruptcy Reform Act that would have denied bankruptcy protection to those who protest at abortion clinics. Once we became aware of this amendment, we immediately sent out hundreds of thousands of emails to our online members, describing the amendment and encouraging them to contact their representatives with their points of view. Through the open Internet we were able to quickly and effectively communicate information pertinent to our over 3 million members and they, in turn, were able to swiftly relay their opinions to those who represent them in Congress. Thanks in part to our active members we were able to

successfully defeat the amendment.

The Christian Coalition's use of the Internet to help us and our members engage in the political process is why we believe that preserving and protecting an open Internet is so important. We believe that organizations such as the Christian Coalition should be able to continue to use the Internet to communicate with our members and with a worldwide audience without a phone or cable company snooping in on our communications and deciding whether to allow a particular communication to proceed, slow it down, block it, or offer to speed it up if the author pays extra to be on the "fast lane."

Unfortunately, in the last couple of years, we have seen network operators block political speech, block content, and block the most popular applications on the Internet. As you know, one cable company was discovered to have blocked consumers' ability to download the King James Bible.

Unfortunately, however, vendors of "deep packet inspection" technology are today actively marketing to allow network operators to inspect the content of my communications and decide whether to slow down or block the speech, or perhaps put my speech on the fast lane if my organization pays the broadband provider an additional tax to have access to their fast lane that connects to the Internet. I am concerned about this level of invasion into the privacy of the members of my organization, and its burden on our freedom of association and speech. If you care about grassroots democracy, I respectfully suggest it ought to concern you as well.

A non-profit, family organization like the Christian Coalition depends on an open Internet to allow us to compete against big media companies, and deep-pocketed political organizations to reach our members and allow our members to contact their representatives. The open Internet levels the playing field for organizations like ours, and we have seen how the Internet has allowed the Christian Coalition to amplify its voice to be heard in important policy debates.

The Christian Coalition does not seek burdensome regulations. We generally believe that less government is better than more government. We support a free market of ideas and commerce on the Internet.

However, at this time, we need very limited rules of the road to protect the new public cybersquare. Any threat to the ability of organizations and groups to reach the American public at very low cost without permission is simply unacceptable and strikes at the heart of citizen participation and well functioning democracy in the 21st century.

Consequently, we support the Chairman's proposal to codify some basic light-weight rules that would preserve the qualities that have made the Internet the most market-driven tool for communication, speech, and innovation ever invented.

Increasingly, faith-based groups are turning to the Internet to promote their political rights, to engage in what Ronald Reagan called "the hard work of freedom." The on-ramps to activism must be kept open and accessible for citizen-activists across the

political spectrum so we can continue that work in our time.

Thank you.