



No surprises here: Michael Powell was FCC chairman during the deregulation frenzy of the first term of George W. Bush. Today, he's the president of the National Cable & Telecommunications Association, the largest cable industry lobbying group in the country.

With the arrival of President George W. Bush, the new Republican majority at the FCC promptly began obliterating checks and balances at the behest of some of the nation's largest phone and cable companies. The results:

- Reselling rights and wholesale leasing of facilities to competitors were wiped away, guaranteeing monopoly control of already-established networks;
- Opening up the long distance and local market to Baby Bell competition with their promise they would compete nationwide failed. Like Big Cable, the Baby Bells sold local and long distance only to their own customers, not to those located in another Baby Bell's service area;
- Instead of competing, phone companies simply bought each other. "As soon as one transaction was approved, another one came through the door," Copps reported. "Sometimes it seemed like the merger approval business was our only business.";
- "The FCC voted, over the strenuous objections of Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein and Michael Copps, to remove advanced telecommunications (broadband) from the purview of Title II of the Telecommunications Act—where consumer protections, competition, privacy, and public safety are clearly mandated—and placed them instead in the nebulous and uncharted land of Title I, where regulatory authority is uncertain, consumer protections are virtually non-existent, and where the huge companies are better positioned to wreak havoc on the promise of competition," Copps said.

To right the wrongs, Copps wants some major changes to reignite competition and return to telecom innovation, eliminating the stagnation we have from today's cozy, barely competitive marketplace:

1. Learn to say "no" to more industry mergers. Consolidation has not brought communications nirvana for consumers, just higher prices and fewer choices, often from a monopoly provider;

2. Encourage innovative approaches like municipal broadband. Copps: “‘My way or nothing’ may be the mantra of the big guys, but that means no broadband in places they don’t wish to serve.” Copps wants to see the federal government preempt state bans on public broadband laws provider-backed ALEC has gotten through legislatures across the country;
3. Smarter stewardship of wireless spectrum, including unlicensed spectrum use, shared spectrum, smarter technology, and a “use it or lose it” policy that pulls back unused/warehoused spectrum held by some of the nation’s largest wireless carriers.

Copps believes today’s barely competitive marketplace is a direct consequence of the regulatory policies custom-written to meet the needs of the giant corporations whose oligopoly those policies now protect. The anti-competitive marketplace can be broken up in short order if rules are implemented that meet the needs of ordinary Americans, not seven-figure corporate lobbying efforts.