

# **Opening Remarks of Commissioner Grueneich at the March 11, 2005 Telecommunications Issues Conference**

Good morning. I would like to welcome all of you to my Telecommunications Issues Conference. I am holding this event so that I can get a broad overview of the telecommunications industry and better understand the history of telecommunications regulation and the issues facing the Commission today.

I appreciate everyone's willingness to take the time to be here. I understand that there were more volunteers for the panels than there were spots to fill. In an effort to hear from everyone, I have reserved time at the end of the day for those attendees who have not had an opportunity to speak. If you are interested in doing so, please sign up at the Public Advisor's table, which is in the lobby.

Although the agenda is ambitious, I hope that through today's presentations and discussions, I can be better informed about the issues facing the telecommunications industry and before this Commission. I have tried to select a balance of speakers for each panel, and I expect to hear a range of positions on the various issues. I hope that today all panelists will start to give me the background I need to make good decisions at this Commission. I want you to be as objective as possible while also explaining your perspective.

I have selected four areas for focus today:

1. The New Regulatory Framework
2. The Changing Competitive Environment
3. Jurisdictional Issues
4. Universal Service and Public Purpose Program Areas

The format will be as follows. I have asked Commission staff to lead off each panel with a brief historical overview and a list of possible issues for the Commission to address. Next, the panel members will give short presentations. At the end of each panel, I will ask questions of the panel members.

Before we start, I want to take this opportunity to make clear my priorities for this next year in the telecommunications arena. First, I am committed to reinstating a Telecommunications Consumer Bill of Rights by the end of this year. Last week I sent a letter to the assigned commissioner requesting that she move forward on identifying those portions of the Bill of Rights that can be reinstated

immediately and that she lay out a schedule for the review and resolution of other issues to ensure that the Commission can issue a final decision by the end of this year. For those of you who have not seen my letter, copies are available in the lobby. I have met with Commissioner Kennedy and I believe she will be issued a ruling in the BCOR case that sets forth a schedule, proposed areas of focus, and seeks comments on early reinstatement.

The Bill of Rights is my first and foremost telecommunications priority for this year. To get this process moving, I have scheduled an all-party meeting on the Bill of Rights for Thursday, March 24, from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., in this auditorium. I initiated this separate event to consider the issues surrounding the Bill of Rights rather than incorporating it into today's packed agenda. At my Bill of Rights meeting, I have asked parties to discuss whether there are areas of consumer protection at risk during the stay period, what portions of the Bill of Rights could be reinstated on an expedited basis, what are the areas of concern regarding impact on competition, technological innovation, fairness and economic development, and if there are potential areas of consensus. If you have questions regarding the Bill of Rights all-party meeting, please contact Karen Miller, of my staff.

Second, the Commission must address the mergers. We have the application for a merger between SBC and AT&T before the Commission already, and expect a second application for a merger between Verizon and MCI to be filed very soon. I am committed to assisting in a speedy review of the merger applications and hopefully a ruling by the Commission on the merger applications by the end of this year.

Third, the Commission must adopt a finalized Broadband report and send that to the Legislature. I am reviewing the Report carefully and expect to provide my input and comments on the draft report shortly.

And finally, there are also many ongoing telecommunications proceedings that need to be finished up and closed.

Clearly, the Commission has a full plate in front of it at this time. I am concerned that Commission staff and my fellow Commissioners and I have the time and resources to adequately address these matters. Thus, at this time, I do not support the opening of new proceedings in the telecommunications arena.

I would like to thank the people who have worked hard to pull this conference together. I want to thank the Public Advisor's office for all the behind the scenes assistance they provided. I would especially like to thank Dorothy Lee for the conference posters she designed. I would like to thank Jack Leutza and his staff in the Telecommunications Division for all their technical input and willingness to

frame the debate in the opening presentations for each panel. I would like to thank Evelyn Gonzales and Jackie Gorzoch for getting out the agendas and making the power point presentations available. And finally, I would like to thank Karen Miller, my interim telecommunications advisor, for pulling this entire event together.

We have a very ambitious agenda to cover today. Panelists must stay within their seven-minute time allotment. Larry Chaset, one of my advisors, is taking the role of Master of Ceremonies today. Larry will hold all the speakers to their allotted time. So be forewarned: you will be cut off if you go over your seven minutes. So, let's get on with the presentations and thanks again to all of you for being here today.