

**Opening Statement of Commissioner Ellen L. Weintraub**  
Hearing on Proposed Rulemaking on Certain Internet Communications  
June 28-29, 2005

I would like to welcome all the witnesses and I want especially to thank the over eight hundred private citizens around the country who offered comments regarding the Commission's proposals.

The resounding message that has been conveyed by these commenters is that the internet has emerged as the great equalizer in political debate, raising the vast and diverse voices of common citizens above the established voices of other media. As Chiara LaRotonda of Seattle, Washington wrote: "I used political blogs to enhance and expand my understanding of the issues pertaining to the 2004 presidential elections and honestly believe that I would not have been as informed a voter otherwise.... One of the best things about the internet for me is the multitude of voices to be found, from every perspective and standpoint."

Andrew Collins of Portland, Oregon urged us to "[p]lease understand that the immediate free flow of ideas worldwide, from all sides, that one currently finds on the internet is the greatest promoter and safeguard to democracy we have ever seen. It will only get better as new bloggers from presently oppressed countries start throwing in their two cents."

The internet can be an antidote to the cynicism that develops when the citizenry feels that they have no voice. Many of the comments provide firsthand insight into how the medium provides an outlet that many people believe is otherwise not available. Anthony Ross of San Jose, California wrote: "Maybe the greatest value of blogs is that individuals can convey and share their views without large institutional intermediaries that keep all but a very few people from effectively speaking... Blogs provide a kind of middle class in the economy of information and can have a stabilizing effect if they're not driven out of the marketplace."

I look forward to the testimony of those who will appear before us today and tomorrow. We invited the commenters to look carefully at our proposals and tell us what we could do better to protect expression, while still complying with the court order that made this rulemaking necessary. We have received some very detailed and insightful examinations of our proposals and will carefully consider these comments as we shape a final rule. I appreciate that many of the comments have been generally supportive of the Commission's focus and precision in this sensitive area. To the many people who took the time to write to us, your comments have been very constructive and helpful. I anticipate an illuminating discussion with the witnesses.