

**Press Statement
of
Commissioner James H. Quello**

July 15, 1997

First, I wish to thank the members of the Network Reliability and Interoperability Council for their efforts over the past 15 months. Our charge to the Council in April of 1996 was to help the FCC fulfill its mandate under section 256 of the 1996 Act. The executive summary of the Council's Report looks very promising, and the public is fortunate to have such talented members of the private sector supporting this effort.

I am particularly pleased the Council's Report appears to reaffirm the principle of looking first to the industry, rather than to government, when technical standards for end user access and network interoperability are needed. My preference for voluntary industry standards is tempered, however, by the fact that standard-setting can greatly affect competition. It is my hope that voluntary industry standards will promote competition in telecommunications markets. It is possible, however, that the failure of telecommunications carriers to adopt standards could harm competition. Therefore, it is important that the government is available as a facilitator, and as a backstop, to voluntary standard-setting by the industry. Congress struck precisely this balance when it adopted section 256 of the 1996 Act. Section 256 requires the FCC to establish a mechanism for overseeing voluntary industry standard-setting. Section 256 permits, but does not require, the FCC to participate in that process. It appears that today's Report from the Council is faithful to this important principle.

In presenting its report today, the Council proposes a number of steps that I regard as quite positive for American consumers. To mention just one, I would cite the Council's encouragement of incumbent LECs and internet service providers to engage in joint network planning and usage monitoring. Specifically, the Council has developed a template to help ISPs and telecommunications carriers with performance monitoring. These entities have strenuously debated the effect of internet usage on the public telephone network, and I believe this template will spur ISPs and carriers to address network usage issues in a productive way. Steps taken as a result of this dialog will help ensure that the internet and the public switched network grow and change in ways that benefit all affected parties.

I would also note that the Council's Report demonstrates significant effort in the area of access to telecommunications by persons with disabilities. This is an area where voluntary industry initiatives may be insufficient to fully serve the public interest. Therefore I enthusiastically support this aspect of the Council's work.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the more than 200 people from the private sector who contributed to the development of this report. And I particularly wish to commend Jim Keegan, Bob Kimball and Mike Davis of the FCC's Office of Engineering and Technology for their accomplishments in guiding the Council's deliberations.