

SEPARATE STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER KATHLEEN Q. ABERNATHY

Re: Facilitating the Provision of Spectrum-Based Services to Rural Areas and Promoting Opportunities for Rural Telephone Companies to Provide Spectrum-Based Services, Notice of Inquiry (adopted December 11, 2002)

Today's NOI is an important step toward improving our policy process regarding rural spectrum. As I mentioned in my statement in the 27 MHz Order earlier this year, I believe the decision-making process will greatly benefit from additional data regarding the spectrum being used, the services being provided, and the needs in rural America. In turn, the Commission has an obligation to ensure that our regulatory tools are effective in facilitating the efficient use of spectrum in rural regions. This NOI seeks to do just that.

First, it will broaden our understanding of the availability of wireless services in rural areas. Second, it asks whether the policies the Commission has adopted in the past to encourage the provision of spectrum-based services to rural areas and the participation of rural telephone companies in the competitive bidding for spectrum licenses are effective. The NOI also solicits comment on whether there are new approaches that may better accomplish these goals.

Through my work at the Commission and as chair of the Federal/State Joint Board on Universal Service, I have learned how critical it is for us to fulfill our statutory mandates regarding service to rural and underserved areas of the country. I look forward to gathering a record in this proceeding that will help us harness the enormous potential of spectrum-based services to bring additional competition and consumer benefits to rural America.