

August 6, 2003

**SEPARATE STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN MICHAEL K. POWELL**

Tremendous Opportunities to Build Digital Communications Capabilities of Rural America

The digital migration has the potential to touch the lives of every American—from young to old, from rich to poor and from urban to rural America. At the forefront of the Commission’s digital migration agenda is fostering the ubiquitous deployment of digital technologies to all Americans. Today, the digital migration takes us to rural America—home to a fifth of the nation's population and eighty-three percent of the nation’s land.¹

Today’s series of orders and reports illustrate our continued commitment to bring the benefits of competition, digital technology and innovation to rural America. These items, which address everything from enhanced financial assistance for rural carriers to reduced regulatory burdens on satellite earth stations located in the Alaskan bush, represent only a portion of our agenda to bring communications services and opportunities to Americans who live in rural and underserved areas of the country. Advances in communications technology, including digital television, wireless phones, satellite-fed services and unlicensed devices, offer the opportunity to improve the quality of life and to promote economic development in rural America. The reports and initiatives adopted today will help us not only ensure that rural Americans can realize the opportunities of the digital communications revolution, but also fulfill our statutory mandate to improve communications access and innovation throughout the country.

We are committed to bringing the benefits of 21st Century communications capabilities to rural Americans. Over the next few months, we will launch public education efforts in three areas of the country – Alaskan Native Villages, the Mississippi River Delta, and Appalachia - typified by significantly lower-than-average telephone penetration rates. We will build on our success with tribal governments to craft public outreach efforts to ensure that all Americans benefit from programs such as Lifeline and Link Up. Here at the Commission our rural liaisons will serve as central points of contact for those looking for information about the Commission’s rural policy work. In addition to these outreach activities, we will continue to explore policy changes that may encourage deployment of communications infrastructure in rural America. Our Rural Wireless Internet Service Provider Showcase and Workshop on September 17 will highlight some of the success stories of wireless broadband deployment in rural America. And there are more innovative policy approaches on the way.

The digital migration is for all Americans. I look forward to working with my colleagues to continue to bring its promise to rural America.

¹ Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture, *Enhanced Quality of Life for Rural Americans*, available at <<http://www.ers.usda.gov/emphases/rural/>> (last visited, Aug. 5, 2003).

