

Remarks of  
Michael K. Powell  
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission  
At the  
University of Tennessee Telehealth Network  
Knoxville, TN  
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(As Prepared for Delivery)

Thank you, Chairwoman Pope, for the kind introduction. Let me also thank Sam Burgess, Director of the University of Tennessee Telehealth Network, Debi Tate, Chair of the Tennessee Regulatory Authority, and Tom Rogers, CEO of Tech 2020 for their leadership and hospitality.

I appreciate the opportunity you have given me to see the dramatic difference advanced telecommunications technology can make in the lives of patients and healthcare professionals. What we have seen today is an example of how advanced broadband networks can make the latest and best in life-saving medical expertise available to all Americans regardless of how many miles separate doctor and patient. It isn't possible to put a value on the lives saved and the lives improved thanks to this advanced telecommunications capability.

And yet telemedicine is but one of many real-life miracles that access to advanced broadband networks makes possible. Having access to these networks also means being able to utilize commercial, educational, cultural and entertainment opportunities that were formerly not available outside the largest urban areas.

By enabling virtually *anyone, anywhere*, to send and receive voice, video and data communications of all types, advanced broadband networks can finally eradicate the persistent disadvantages in distance and opportunity that have divided us as a society and prevented many of our citizens from achieving their full potential. The President recognized this when he announced the goal of making advanced broadband network service available and affordable to all Americans by 2007, and he had it right in saying that, "The quality of life for our citizens is going to improve dramatically as we spread this technology all across America."

And I think this is the best answer to why affordable access to advanced broadband networks is so important. In our exuberance over the obvious shot in the arm advanced telecommunications provides to business, we often tend to focus on "killer apps" and e-commerce -- on what new technology will allow us to *sell*. But the impact of these new networks is deeper than that, much more profound, and more lasting in the way they connect all Americans to heretofore unavailable new resources that touch and improve every aspect of our lives. And nothing demonstrates this better than the telemedicine wonders we saw this morning.

We can also see this in what broadband is doing for young people in schools, by giving them educational materials and tools previously available to only the largest or most affluent school districts. When I was a kid and needed to look something up I used encyclopedias. Now, my kids just log on to the Internet and the world is instantly at their fingertips. Broadband access

is enabling students to obtain real-time educational instruction from qualified educators that would not otherwise be available in the local community.

When rural schools can provide their students with the same resources and information as those in urban areas, local economic opportunity will increase, a more highly skilled local workforce will be created, and fewer people will be forced to relocate to find good jobs.

The availability of broadband access is critical to attracting new businesses to rural areas and giving existing businesses the availability to compete with firms in more urban settings. With broadband access, worker productivity increases, jobs are created, and wages and the tax base grow.

Broadband access is also critical to meeting the safety and security needs of rural communities. Local public safety officials can get access to the information they need to assess and act on threats. In times of crisis or a natural disaster, getting accurate information to residents can be a life saver. Informed citizens are better prepared to help themselves and their neighbors in times of need. That holds true as much in small towns and communities as anywhere else.

While the benefits of broadband deployment in rural America are many, there are also unique funding and technological challenges in bringing basic and advanced telecommunications services to rural communities. I believe that the best way to accomplish this goal is to establish partnerships – with our sister federal agencies and regional commissions; state, local and tribal governments; and industry. Working together, through these types of partnerships, we can and will continue to make a difference in addressing the funding challenges in bringing 21<sup>st</sup> Century telecommunications services to rural communities.

The FCC has begun a partnership with the Appalachian Regional Commission in order to help inform rural health care providers about available resources, including funding through the universal service rural health care program. I extend my gratitude to Chairwoman Anne Pope personally and to the staff of the Appalachian Regional Commission for their leadership, and I look forward to continuing this excellent working partnership.

I also want to thank Hilda Legg for her leadership at the Rural Utility Service. Since the kick-off of our Federal Rural Wireless Initiative almost a year ago, RUS has been the FCC's steadfast partner in our joint efforts to increase broadband access in rural communities. Access to the capital needed for infrastructure deployment is critical to this mission. I am proud to report that Hilda has been tireless in her effort in this area, and I look forward to continuing our collaboration in the future.

Essential to the success of any such collaborative effort is the recognition that broadband applications can be delivered over a variety of technology platforms. From wireless, to satellite, to broadband-over-powerline, we are seeing better access technologies develop all the time. It is the Commission's job to create an environment that encourages others to develop innovative technologies for consumers. The challenge for rural America is to identify the technology and service options available and tailor technology solutions to meet the specific needs of each community.

You have shown you are up to the challenge, and the FCC is doing its best to fulfill its role too. Last August, we initiated a comprehensive Rural Action Plan, which will enable a variety of wireless telecom providers to offer different types of advanced broadband services in rural areas. Two months ago we amended our rules to make more efficient use of a particular band of spectrum that can be used to more effectively support telemedicine in many rural and underserved areas, including Native American Tribal Lands. We will continue our ongoing program of on-site forums exploring how best to make affordable broadband access available to rural America.

Next week at the monthly Commission agenda meeting we will take up a number of items designed to directly benefit rural access to advanced services. In our rural services item, we will consider a variety of measures to introduce regulatory flexibility for rural licensees in order to promote facilities deployment and increase wireless access for rural consumers. Among the contemplated changes are measures to increase access to capital, reducing a significant entry barrier for companies seeking to provide rural service. Also at the meeting, we have an item that will provide additional flexibility to operate wireless broadband in Rural America.

Last November, we began allowing rural health care providers to receive funding equal to 25 percent of the monthly cost of Internet access reasonably related to health care. In the coming months we will act on an item to enhance the rural health care support mechanism, further facilitating access to funding for these essential programs.

Our secondary markets item will also facilitate rural service. Spectrum access has been a continuing problem for rural and urban service providers alike. Our new spectrum leasing rules give carriers a market-based incentive to make spectrum lying fallow in rural and less densely populated markets available to companies willing and able to provide service now. Our proposals to further streamline and expedite the leasing process are designed to ensure that the public spectrum resource is put to work for rural America.

I want to take the opportunity of this visit to the University of Tennessee Telehealth Network, as well as my visit yesterday to Vanderbilt University Medical Center, to underscore my commitment to the Administration's goal of making affordable broadband access available to all Americans, and to continuing to pursue policies that improve the rural healthcare program, increase participation by rural healthcare providers, and ensure that the benefits of the program continue to be distributed in a fair and equitable manner.

While at Vanderbilt, I was privileged to see a demonstration of the same Electronic medical records system that so impressed President Bush recently. I am equally impressed with what is happening here in Knoxville.

It is always exciting to see how the right public policy decisions translate into real-life benefits for people. I am extremely pleased to see how broadband-based programs, such as yours, are meeting the healthcare needs of rural communities, and I continue to be amazed by other new services and applications being developed to improve the lives of rural Americans. Much of the credit goes to you and to people like you throughout the country, and I congratulate you for your dedication.

Thank you very much.

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