

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

Re: Rural Health Care Support Mechanism, Second Report and Order, Order on Reconsideration, and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, WC Docket No. 02-60

Telecommunications technology can make a dramatic difference in the lives of patients and healthcare professionals. The transformative potential of telemedicine is happening at places such as the University of Virginia's Office of Telemedicine and University of Tennessee Telehealth Network. In Iraq, telemedicine links are allowing troops in Iraq to communicate with their loved ones in the U.S., face-to-face. With the support of our rural health care mechanism, doctors are using technology to improve health care by making telemedicine a reality in rural areas of America and across the globe.

Today's item furthers the Commission's efforts to improve the rural healthcare support mechanism to ensure that the statutory goals of section 254 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 are met. The definition of rural has generated a lot of interest from the applicant community and I am pleased to support a decision that updates the definition based on the 2000 census data. With each revision to the program we see the positive results for rural health care providers and the people they serve. I am also pleased to support revisions to our rules to expand funding for mobile rural health care services by subsidizing the difference between the rate for satellite service and the rate for an urban wireline service with a similar bandwidth.

Lastly, in the *Further Notice*, the Commission seeks comment on whether it should increase the percentage discount that rural health care providers receive for Internet access and whether infrastructure development should be funded. Additionally, the Commission seeks comment on whether to modify its rule specifically to allow mobile rural health care providers to receive discounts for facilities other than satellite. I look forward to working with my colleagues to further unlock the potential of this program and to address the issues raised in the *Further Notice*.