

Remarks of Commissioner Robert M. McDowell  
March 4, 2010  
8<sup>th</sup> Floor -- South Conference Room  
1:35 p.m.

*7<sup>th</sup> Annual Dialogue on Improving Telecommunications Access in Indian Country*

Welcome to the FCC and thank you for participating today. I am pleased to be with you. The dialogue today is an important part of the Commission's commitment to tribal sovereignty and the federal trust responsibility. I welcome each and every opportunity to share ideas for helping to promote tribal self-sufficiency and economic development.

I'll start with a bit of historical perspective. In May 2008, the Commission adopted a cap on competitive eligible telecommunications carrier access to high-cost universal service support. While controlling the growth of the fund was important, I felt it critical that the Commission include an exception to that cap for all of the providers serving tribes across the country – some of the most overlooked parts of America. This limited exception was designed to ensure that companies operating in these areas will continue to receive high-cost support to provide their services while we move toward a permanent reform of the Universal Service system. At that time, my colleagues and I pledged to resolve questions regarding the implementation of that proposed exception. I am pleased that we fulfilled that pledge – adopting an order less than a year thereafter.

More recently, I am pleased to let you know of my support for last month's

order, which affords a priority under Commission rules to Native American Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, and tribal consortia to assist them in obtaining new radio stations designed to serve their tribal communities. Tribal lands and Alaska Native lands are some of the most difficult to serve in the country. Our rule change is designed to be a solid first step in fostering the development of new stations owned and controlled by Tribes to serve their communities on tribal lands. By affording the Tribes an improved opportunity to provide news, information, entertainment and public safety alerts to their members, this initiative comports well with the Commission's charge to provide a "fair, efficient and equitable distribution of radio service" across the nation.

We obviously still have much to accomplish in this area. This is especially true as we enter the broadband era. Soon, the Broadband Team will unveil its National Broadband Plan and I'm pleased to report that it addresses many issues affecting Native Americans. As we constantly push forward, I look forward to working with all of you, my colleagues here at the Commission, and other stakeholders to fulfill our commitments.

Thank you again.