

**STATEMENT OF  
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

*Re: Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism, CC Docket No. 02-6, A National Broadband Plan for Our Future, GN Docket No. 09-51*

Three months ago, the Commission approved an Order which would allow schools to make E-Rate funded facilities and services available to the general public outside of regular school hours. That Order was this Commission's first official action toward achieving the goals of the National Broadband Plan. Of all the programs and initiatives that I've seen at the FCC, E-Rate is, to my mind, easily the best. By connecting schools and libraries to the Internet, it has connected a generation of young people to the enabling technology of the Twenty-first century. Thanks to E-Rate, students and communities across the land can access the digital tools necessary to learn, to compete, to find opportunity and to prosper. I can't think of a better program to put front-and-center as we move forward to implement the National Broadband Plan.

So I am pleased to support this item to improve and modernize E-Rate by considering ways to streamline the application process, to provide greater flexibility for program participants to select among broadband services and expand the reach of broadband to the classroom. E-Rate, which has accomplished so much for so many, can have a future even more illustrious than the achievements it has already logged. This program deserves to be empowered so it can keep up with the latest technologies and with all the new educational tools that are coming online. The item before us considers a broad array of possibilities—some may turn out to be, upon examination by commenters in the weeks ahead, better than others. And there will be many ideas we haven't even thought of here. But—a note of realism—we must always be cognizant that this is a capped program, so some priorities trump others. The basic task is to get high speed, high capacity broadband out to these institutions—and that challenge takes precedence over some of the other very meritorious ideas which could bring added luster to E-rate. Providing access is the precondition for harvesting the rich fruits of that access.

I thank my colleagues for their continuing support of the E-Rate program, and I also want to express my gratitude to the Bureau for its hard and creative work on this item. I look forward to developing a really good and innovative record on this Notice and moving forward to actions that will make this hugely successful program even better.