

**STATEMENT OF  
COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Office of Native Affairs and Policy 2012 Annual Report* (March 20, 2013)

By any measure, communities on Tribal lands historically have had less access to basic telecommunications services than communities in just about any other part of the country. But this deficit does not end with simple phone service. It has transcended telephony and has carried over into broadband. The result? Too many of our Native lands are on the far side of a complex and recalcitrant digital divide.

Bridging this digital divide cuts to the core of the Commission's universal service mission. But solutions are not easy. As today's report suggests, in Indian Country, "one size fits none." I have seen this first hand. Some years ago, I ventured with the Office of Native Affairs and Policy's Geoff Blackwell deep into Washoe territory, when we visited the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony. As I recall, leaving the highway and heading into the Tribal desert meant leaving behind just about any semblance of a wireless signal. Last year, I spent time in Inupiat villages near the Arctic Circle in Alaska. In communities separated from each other by thousands of roadless miles, access to broadband is a lifeline. Yet without middle mile transport facilities, satellite hops can limit the speed of services essential for healthcare, education, economic development, and full participation in modern civic life.

Again, the issues are complex and the solutions are not easy. But count me as an optimist. Because outreach is a start. Because the Commission is engaged. Because leadership in Tribal communities is steadfast and committed. Because our universal service policies—like the Tribal Mobility Fund—are poised to bring new focus to the persistent gaps in Tribal deployment. Because in time I believe that the hard economics of networks and the issues of scale that come with vast stretches of land and low population are ripe for new technological solutions. Moreover, I believe that by working together we can speed that day, bridge this divide, and accomplish some really great things.

Thank you to the Office of Native Affairs and Policy for this presentation—and for the important work you do.