NEWS

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

News Media Information: (202) 418-0500
Internet: http://www.fcc.gov
TTY: (888) 835-5322

This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).

STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI
ON BROADBAND'S IMPACT ON SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES IN SOUTH DAKOTA

America needs to fully enter the digital age—and that starts with our nation's schools and libraries. I saw that for myself yesterday in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

During my visit to Sioux Falls New Technology High School, I learned through meetings with the principal and other school officials how the school integrates a one-to-one program—that is, one device for each student—into the learning process. At the main branch of the Siouxland Libraries, I got to see how Internet access empowers library patrons to apply for a job, take a class, or do their homework.

Sioux Falls is no anomaly. It's amazing what schools and libraries across South Dakota have done with so little. Even though promoting broadband across 77,123 square miles is the definition of a high-cost endeavor, South Dakota schools have received about 30% less per student than New Jersey schools. And while the Siouxland Libraries stretch their resources so thinly that some rural libraries only operate three hours a day, library officials told me that they've given up applying for E-Rate funding because the process is so burdensome and the rewards for rural libraries so few.

In sum, the E-Rate program just isn't meeting the needs of rural America. E-Rate's funding formula favors larger, urban school districts that can afford to hire consultants to navigate the administrative process and draw every dollar E-Rate makes available to them. In contrast, E-Rate offers smaller, rural schools and libraries less funding, even when broadband costs more for them and they don't have the resources to hire outside help. A sad refrain I've heard over and over is that applying for E-Rate funding just isn't worth the effort. That's a digital divide we shouldn't tolerate.

The FCC needs to reform E-Rate to make it more user-friendly and target the needs of students and library patrons. We cannot expect those who teach our children and serve our communities to master arcane rules that few lawyers or accountants can understand. They deserve better.

And we can do better. A student-centered E-Rate program[1] would cut the red tape. It would end funding inequities and focus E-Rate on connecting citizens young and old to digital opportunities. And it would bring more transparency to a process that is hopelessly opaque to people in the Best Little City in America and beyond.

It's time for real reform.

---

[1] Remarks of Commissioner Ajit Pai, "Connecting the American Classroom: A Student-Centered E-Rate Program," American Enterprise Institute (July 16, 2013), *available at* http://go.usa.gov/jbD3.