

**SEPARATE STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER KEVIN J. MARTIN
APPROVING IN PART, DISSENTING IN PART**

Re: Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service

Today's decision adopts many of the Federal-State Joint Board's recommendations on which services should be supported by the federal universal service program. This decision reaffirms our commitment to preserve and advance universal service by ensuring the affordability and availability of telecommunications services in all regions of the Nation.

As I have stated before, I would have preferred to pursue a further Notice to obtain more data on how, and to what extent, the federal universal service support mechanism could assist the deployment of advanced services, or at least the removal of barriers to such deployment, particularly in rural, remote and high cost areas throughout the country.¹ This inquiry would assist our continuing effort to ensure that all Americans, including those in rural and high cost areas, have access to these services.

I also disagree with the decision to postpone the determination of whether equal access should be added to the list of supported services. In my view, the record in this proceeding provides the Commission with sufficient data to decide whether equal access meets the statutory requirements to be designated as a supported service.²

As I have previously, I support inclusion of equal access in the list of supported services. Equal access provides a direct, tangible consumer benefit that allows individuals to decide which long distance plan, if any, is most appropriate for their needs. An equal access requirement would allow ETCs to continue to offer bundled local and long distance service packages, while also empowering consumers with the ability to choose the best calling plan for their needs.

An equal access obligation is also fully consistent with the Commission's existing policy of competitive and technological neutrality amongst service providers, facilitating competition on the basis of price and service quality for comparable service offerings.

¹ See Separate Statement of Commissioner Kevin J. Martin, Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, CC Docket No. 96-45 (rel. July 10, 2002).

² See 47 U.S.C. 254(c)(1).