

**JOINT STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONERS
MICHAEL J. COPPS AND JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN,
DISSENTING**

Re: *Application for Review of a Decision by the Wireline Competition Bureau,; Information Technology Department, State of North Dakota, Bismarck, North Dakota; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service; Changes to the Board of Directors of the National Exchange Carrier Association, Inc.*

Since the inception of the Schools and Libraries Program in 1997, a whole new world of opportunities has been opened to students who might not have access to advanced capabilities without the program. Last year, nearly \$1.7 billion was disbursed to schools and libraries across the United States. We are ardent supporters of this program, in addition to the other universal service programs.

We are troubled that the complexity and rigidity of our application process sometimes prevents eligible and deserving children from experiencing the manifold opportunities that this program allows. This is surely the case with this application filed on behalf of the students of North Dakota. The State of North Dakota filed an electronic application for E-Rate discounts within the filing window, but failed to mail a signed certification until after the window closed. This oversight should not be allowed to exclude the children of North Dakota from access to the necessary tools of the Information Age.

In April of this year, we began taking steps toward improving this already excellent program by initiating a rulemaking that seeks to simplify and streamline the operation of the schools and libraries program. In response to our call for input, many have said that the process is just too complicated and we should work to streamline it and make it more user-friendly. We must balance our need to maintain our keen oversight over this program with efforts to improve access to this program for eligible participants. As members of this Commission, we will work toward that admirable goal.