

**CONCURRING STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, Order on Reconsideration
(CC Docket No. 96-45)

I support today's effort to resolve outstanding petitions for reconsideration of the Commission's early universal service decisions. It is important that the Commission reduce its backlog and clean out its regulatory closets. But I limit my support to concurring because many of these petitions involve fundamental issues that go to the very core of how we have organized the contribution and distribution mechanisms for universal service support. These petitions predate my participation in this process. Many are also the subject of further rulemaking proceedings. As a result, I expect there will be opportunities in the future to rethink the Commission's earlier approaches. Therefore, I remain open to taking a fresh look at all of these issues.

One issue mentioned in today's decision strikes me as demanding our attention sooner, rather than later: insular areas. Since 1999, the Commission has had open and outstanding a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on universal service issues affecting insular areas. While these areas may benefit from our present universal service support mechanisms, the Commission has acknowledged that it must address separately the communications needs of remote and insular communities. Indeed, Congress specifically directed the Commission to ensure that "[c]onsumers in all regions of the Nation, including low-income consumers and those in rural, *insular*, and high cost areas" have access to reasonably comparable services at reasonably comparable rates (italics added). But the Commission has failed over time to give this phrase full meaning. We are long past due to address this aspect of the statute and incorporate this concept in our universal service support system. As we move forward and consider other universal service reforms, I hope that the Commission takes this statutory language into consideration.