

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

Re: *Rural Health Care Support Mechanism*, Second Report and Order, Order on Reconsideration, and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

I am pleased to support today's decision updating the Commission's rural health care support mechanism. I especially am pleased that we update our definition of rural. Our outdated and cramped definition actually disqualified communities that are considered rural under other well-established state and federal agency programs. So getting this definition right is fundamental. I hope as we move forward we can work with state and local officials for further assurance that our definition is adequate. I also am pleased that in today's decision we extend support for satellite services for mobile health clinics. There are already proposals to use this support to expand cancer screening on tribal lands. This is a great example of the creative medical services this program can inspire.

Ultimately, though, these initiatives deserve to be part of a more comprehensive goal. In the wake of 9/11 we must be awake to the heightened threat of health catastrophe and rededicate ourselves to doing something about it. In the past year, I have visited hospitals and emergency responders in big cities and small towns. I also have visited the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta. They are all attuned to the importance of fast and reliable communications, especially in the wake of a biological attack. We can continue to dance at the margins of our rural health care mechanism, or we can set a bold goal and seek to use our statutory authority to help attain it. I think that we need to demonstrate how healthcare communications are important to homeland security and our goal should be that every hospital and health center in this country has a broadband connection by 2010 and is fully integrated into the emergency response communications system. We can do this; this is the program to do it; and what a contribution that would be.

Thanks to the Bureau for bringing us this good item and for continuing work to achieve what this program is capable of achieving.