

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER ROBERT M. MCDOWELL**

Re: In the Matter of Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Darien Telephone Company, Inc., Logan Telephone Cooperative, Inc., and Roanoke & Botetourt Telephone Company; Requests for Review of Decisions of the Universal Service Administrative Company; CC Docket No. 96-45

I support this item as an interim measure taken in the interest of fairness and predictability for the companies affected. Under the current Universal Service Fund distribution regime, refunding the safety net additive support that was summarily deducted from these companies' universal service support after the companies had received, and most likely had relied, on that safety net additive support is necessary at this time. Further, our clarification of section 36.605 of our rules to provide that carriers may qualify for safety net additive support in each year that they meet the 14 percent trigger will ensure that carriers making similar levels of investment receive similar support.

However, it is important to realize that while our action today addresses a matter of fairness under the current rules; it does nothing to address the need for more comprehensive reform of the Universal Service Fund. I, therefore, see this as an interim measure only. The safety net additive may have been adopted with the best of intentions --to encourage investment in rural network infrastructure -- but it is a part of a support distribution system in dire need of more than just a clarification of a rule.