

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

Re: *In the Matter of NEC-Business Network Solutions, Inc.*, File No. EB-03-IH-0738

No program may be doing more to close the digital divide for rural Americans and the economically disadvantaged than the E-Rate program. Indeed, there are many hard-working people in the Schools and Libraries Division, at the FCC and Justice Department, and elsewhere, who are to be commended for successfully bringing the Internet to our schools and libraries and for ensuring that waste, fraud and abuse are ferreted out. NEC-Business Network Solutions, Inc.'s (NEC) convictions and its six month debarment from the program is evidence of the joint effort underway to eliminate any wrongdoing from the E-Rate program. I therefore concur in today's Order.

However, as a general matter, I believe that a six month debarment period is often times little more than a slap on the wrist for companies engaged in efforts to defraud the E-Rate program of millions of dollars and, in the end, our children of the tools they need in the Digital Age. There were mitigating circumstances in this case, and the companion case of Inter-Tel Technologies, Inc., that support a shorter debarment period. However, a stronger penalty may have been warranted given the importance of the E-Rate program and the severity of NEC's actions.