

**STATEMENT OF  
COMMISSIONER JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN**

*Re: In the Matter of Rural Health Care Support Mechanism, WC Docket No. 02-60*

Broadband facilities are having a profound effect on the way that we deliver medical care. We are only beginning to envision the potential benefits available from new telecommunications technology. This Order represents an important milestone in the Commission's efforts to explore ways to maximize these benefits.

Through this Order, we are selecting sixty-nine worthy applicants to participate in our Rural Health Care Pilot Program. By expanding the Federal Universal Service Rural Health Care program to fund the construction of broadband infrastructure to connect rural health care providers, we enable local healthcare providers to deliver dramatic benefits for their communities.

Indeed, with advances in broadband and digital imaging, health care providers are increasingly able to send medical records, CAT scans, and other lab results to specialists in distant locations. Connecting our health care providers can also play a critical role in promoting continuing education through distance learning for our health care professionals, and is vital to our efforts to respond to disasters, natural and man-made. As we have seen repeatedly in the past few years, our communications systems are a critical factor in our ability to respond quickly and in a coordinated fashion. For rural residents, telemedicine can bridge distances that might otherwise be unaffordable or physically impractical to cross. They may be the only viable link to vital diagnostic services and specialized care for many patients, and they hold great potential for remote monitoring and home healthcare.

I have repeatedly supported efforts to improve the connectivity of rural health care providers and enhance the Rural Health Care program, which is crucial to the sustainability of many telemedicine programs. Without universal service, the high cost of telemedicine services might put them out of reach of many small communities. I commend Chairman Martin, my colleagues and the Bureau for their efforts to develop this Pilot Program, and I look forward to the continued advancement of the Rural Health Care program and to the results of the projects selected in this Order.