

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN,
APPROVING IN FCC 08-22
APPROVING IN FCC 08-4
CONCURRING IN PART, DISSENTING IN PART IN FCC 08-5**

- Re: *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, WC Docket No. 05-337; CC Docket No. 96-45, FCC 08-22 (Joint Board Comprehensive High Cost Recommended Decision Notice)* (Approving).
- Re: *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, WC Docket No. 05-337; CC Docket No. 96-45, FCC 08-4 (Identical Support Rule Notice)* (Approving).
- Re: *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, WC Docket No. 05-337; CC Docket No. 96-45, FCC 08-5 (Reverse Auctions Notice)* (Concurring in Part, Dissenting in Part).

Through these Notices, the Commission seeks comment on potentially profound changes to the Universal Service High Cost program. While I am not without reservations about some of the proposals in these items, I am pleased that the Commission is engaging in serious consideration of how to preserve and advance universal service, one of the bedrock principles of U.S. telecommunications policy. I am particularly encouraged that the Commission is seeking comment on the recommendations of the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service (Joint Board), and I thank the members of the Joint Board for their considerable efforts to bring us this Recommended Decision.

Congress and the Commission recognized early on that the economic, social, and public health benefits of the telecommunications network are increased for all subscribers by the addition of each new subscriber. In Section 254 of the Communications Act, Congress affirmed the broad principle that “consumers in all regions of the nation . . . should have access to telecommunications and information services . . . that are reasonably comparable to those services provided in urban areas and that are available at rates that are reasonably comparable to rates charged for similar services in urban areas.” Implementing universal service as intended by Congress in Section 254 of the Act is among the highest priorities for the Commission.

The task before us – ensuring the continued vitality of universal service – is particularly important as technology and the marketplace continue to evolve. Our choices in this proceeding will have a dramatic effect on the ability of communities and consumers in Rural America to thrive and grow with the rest of the country. History has shown that many rural consumers would be left behind if it weren’t for the support made available through our universal service policies.

The Joint Board’s Recommended Decision for comprehensive reform of the high cost support mechanism – and, in particular, the decision to include broadband as a supported service – is a landmark development. I have long argued that the universal service fund is an integral component of our efforts to meet the broadband challenge. So, the decision to embrace broadband, through the list of supported services and through targeted funding for unserved areas, and the recognition of the effectiveness of the current High Cost Loop Fund in supporting the capital costs of providing broadband-capable loop facilities for rural carriers are encouraging developments.

I must express a degree of reservation over the amount of support allocated to the Broadband Fund, among other limitations on support. Maintaining our commitment to connectivity, particularly in the broadband age, is more important than ever, and the Commission must start to provide realistic assessments of what will be required. To that end, I am also concerned about the impact of reverse auctions and whether such mechanisms can provide adequate incentives for build out in Rural America. For these reasons, I dissent from the tentative conclusions in the separate Reverse Auctions Notice. While I appreciate the majority's willingness to flesh out details of their reverse auction proposal, I cannot support these premature tentative conclusions, and would have preferred a more balanced presentation of the potential disadvantages of such an approach.

There remain many questions about the Recommended Decision and details to be vetted. While I reserve judgment on many of the proposals, there is much here that warrants careful consideration. The Joint Board has wrestled with many difficult issues, including the unique role of providers of last resort, compensation for multiple providers, and the role of the States in fostering universal service, and I look forward to seeking comment on their recommendations. I agree with the Joint Board's recommendation on the identical support rule and support the separate Notice seeking comment on alternative approaches.

As we move forward with these proceedings at the Commission, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the members and staff of the Joint Board. The Joint Board, and the many parties who participated in those proceedings, engaged in a long and arduous effort to bring us these recommendations. I know that we will benefit considerably from their expertise and judgment, and I look forward to the coming dialogue on these proposals with our state commission colleagues, consumers, providers, and the many others with a stake in the future of universal service.